

US706579

1Sk35ra

PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fort Wayne and Allen County, Ind.

EXTRACTS FROM RULES

A fine of two cents a day shall be paid on each volume not returned when book is due. Injuries to books, and losses must be made good. Card holders must promptly notify the Librarian of change of residence under penalty of forfeiture of card.

**EXTRACT FROM
STATE LAW**

Whoever shall wilfully or mischievously, cut, mark, mutilate, write in or upon, or otherwise deface any book, magazine, newspaper, or other property of any library organized under the laws of this state, shall be fined not less than ten dollars nor more than one hundred dollars.

Acme Library Card Pocket

KEEP YOUR CARD IN THIS POCKET

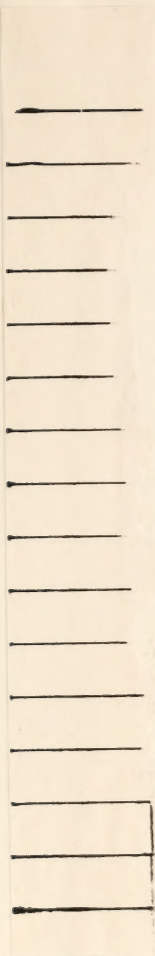
US706579

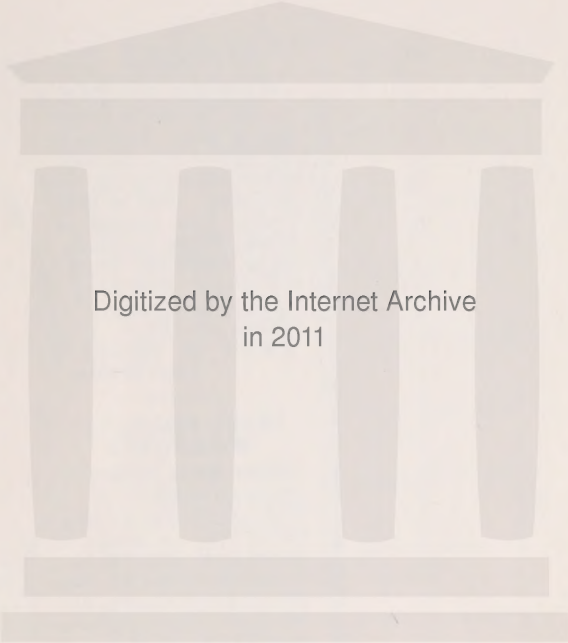
flowers

Stov

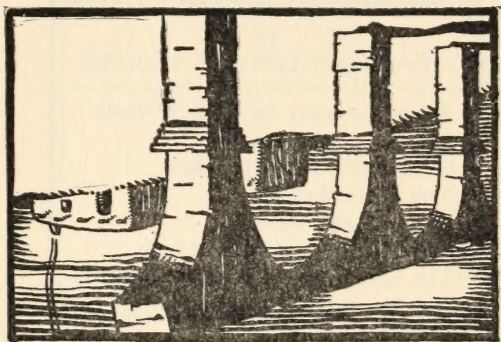


3 1833 00799 1919





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011



THE RANCH OF THE GOLDEN
FLOWERS

BY
CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

BECKY LANDERS: FRONTIER WARRIOR

ROSELLE OF THE NORTH

SILENT SCOT: FRONTIER SCOUT

THE WHITE LEADER

ANDY BREAKS TRAIL

THE TIGER WHO WALKS ALONE

THE RANCH OF THE GOLDEN FLOWERS



THE RANCH OF THE GOLDEN FLOWERS

BY
CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1928

All rights reserved

COPYRIGHT, 1928,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped.
Published November, 1928.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY STRATFORD PRESS, INC.

U. S. 706579

*"To Munita Muñoz-Lee
Who blends the graces of two races."*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTO THE LAND OF GOLD	1
II. TESS MEETS MUNITA	13
III. A CALIFORNIAN WELCOME	25
IV. TESS AND LANK ARE ADOPTED	38
V. ERNESTO HAS A NEW AMBITION	48
VI. PEACOCKS AND A FAMILY BREAKFAST	61
VII. DOÑA JONES EXPLAINS	71
VIII. TESS AND LANK LEARN CALIFORNIAN WAYS	81
IX. LANK ENCOUNTERS BEN YELLOW	89
X. THE LAND JUMPERS ATTACK LANK	95
XI. TESS RIDES AFTER CATTLE	110
XII. THE BIRTHDAY FEAST AT GOLDEN FLOWERS	116
XIII. LANK AND ERNESTO MAKE THEIR PLANS	124
XIV. TESS AND MUNITA HUNT ANTELOPE	130
XV. THE FIGHT IN THE MOONLIGHT AT EL CAJÓN	135
XVI. PLOWED FIELD AND VELVET SHOES	147
XVII. ERNESTO FIGHTS THE BLACK BULL	154
XVIII. FRÉMONT AND KIT CARSON PROMISE AID	164
XIX. THE BATTLE OF THE LASSO, AND THE GOLD RUSH	169
AUTHOR'S NOTE	181



THE RANCH OF THE GOLDEN
FLOWERS



CHAPTER I

INTO THE LAND OF GOLD

FOR endless hours the jaded horse and the rickety wagon piled high with settlers' goods had crawled, like a monstrous unwieldy snail, about the mid-slope of the dry hills. Now the sun hung its flaming disk just over the horizon. The sky was a burning, crystalline blue without a cloud.

A boy of possibly sixteen years of age, with a rifle under his arm, trudged slowly ahead of the horse, breaking trail. His toes came through his broken shoes. Though he was tall, the old trousers and shirt he wore hung away from his lank body. They must once have belonged to a man taller and broader than he. They were powdered with the

2 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

alkali dust of the desert. His sandy head was bent and his sharp, very light gray eyes scanned the roadless way ahead of him. Sometimes he halted and led the horse over a bad place.

"Got ter git down ter flat land an' camp. Horse is near gone. Most tired 'nough ter die," his thoughts ran; but he did not speak his fear aloud to the girl who sat on the wagon seat, loosely holding the reins.

She was smaller and younger than he, and dainty and plastic in her slimness, not rawboned like her brother. The white dust lay in thick patches on her sunbonnet and on her shoulders and knees, making the faded cotton fabric look like flour sacking. Her arms and hands were burnt brown. Dust and tears had streaked the clear white skin of her face and reddened her lids. From just above her ears, two wide ash-blond braids hung forward over her breast almost to her waist. Her large eyes, listless and sorrowful, were a deep blue. With their black lashes and dark brows against her blondness and pallor, they made an arresting contrast. In type she harked back perhaps, through the Celt, to the Norse of those days when a bard sang that the eyes of

some of his people had taken their color from looking with love upon dark seas.

"Seems queer we don't strike a road," she said presently. "With all the folks that's gone ter Californy ahead of us, yer'd think sure there'd be a road. Wonder if we got off the trail an' are goin' some place else without knowin' it. Ain't yer scared a mite, Lank?"

"No, Tess. I ben studyin' the lay o' the land all day an' I guess we're headed right. We got ter git on the level an' camp. Josie's dead beat."

"Poor Josie!"

"The way this country lays out, seems sure we got ter strike a valley or a open place purty soon."

Lank trudged on. Then, shortly, with a turn which seemed to promise nothing, he led the horse out of the twisting funnel of brown hills to where the slope overlooked a wide valley. It was one of those sudden, large, breath-taking vistas of beauty with which the Southwest startles and entrances the traveler.

"Oh, Tess! Look a-here!"

The girl lifted her head. She gasped his name, and stood up in the wagon. Throwing her sun-

4 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

bonnet back, she used her hand to shade her eyes, where fresh tears dried in shining wonder.

"Land o' gold!" she said ecstatically. "Oh, Lank, there 'tis!"

The brown slope took on green just below them and declined briefly to the valley floor, which, thick with poppies, stretched out, for several acres perhaps, like a shield of beaten gold enameled in orange and green. To one side was a grove of silver-green olive trees. A thin placid stream, touched with flame in the sunset, seemed to lie quiet rather than to flow along the edge of the grove. Farther back the walls of adobe buildings, tinged rose now by the sky, showed among the wide drooping pepper trees.

"Oh, Lank! Let's go down quick. See, Josie wants ter. Reckon she smells the grass an' the water. Gold flowers, Lank! Mebbe we can homestead among 'em? Eh, Lank? Mebbe we can!"

"Mebbe."

He took hold of the horse's mane, a safer hold than any part of the head harness, where what was left of the leather was tearing away from the bits of rope and twine with which he had mended fresh breaks that morning. The conglomeration of pots and old chairs—the poor squatter's household

goods—shook together and rattled more loudly on the short steep dip to the field of poppies. As they came down to that magic golden floor, the jaded horse put forth her last spurt of energy and reached the water; only to fall on the grassy marge, with her nose, however, in the creek. The downward jerk of her body was the end of the wagon. One shaft broke off with a sharp snap. Its wood had become as dry and brittle as tinder, on the desert. A wheel came off, and the whole contents of the wagon toppled over on the grass. Tess had stepped out, and was dabbling her hands in the water when poor Josie collapsed. She knelt on the bank, staring helplessly at her brother.

“What we goin’ ter do, Lank?”

His sandy brows were drawn together gravely.

“Reckon all I can do is cut her loose, so she can git up—if she ain’t goin’ ter die. Then I better go an’ ask the folks in the house if they’ll kinder help us out, mebbe.” He cut the horse free. “Don’t git scared,” he said over his shoulder, starting off at as brisk a pace as his weary feet could go. Tess sat in a disconsolate heap beside the horse. Her tears fell again.

Lank came within sight of the house grounds in

6 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

about fifteen minutes. Two horses, saddled, were tied to a post beside a well. An Indian who was spraying rose bushes from a pipe with a large clay bowl, had his back to Lank and did not see him. The boy halted uncertainly by one of the pepper trees. From out of sight, on his right, somewhere, came the sound of doves. While he questioned whether he should try speaking to the man with the spray pipe, or whether he should walk up to the house and knock at the open door, he saw a figure in white move slowly round the right corner of the house. He stared, amazed, as the tall young girl, with billows of white ruffles swaying about her knees and ankles, came on very slowly, enveloped in a cloud of wings. Doves, white and blue and brown and spotted, circled, cooing, about her head, perched momentarily on her shoulders, dipped to eat from her open hand, or whirled in a mass to the ground at her feet as she paused, every few steps, to toss corn from a pouch that dangled from her wrist.

Her glossy jet-black hair, parted in the middle, drooped on her forehead in two heavy even waves. The rest of it was concealed by such a sunbonnet as Lank Hardie had never seen before. A white lace

mantilla flowed about her slender body and draped her head from the conspicuous height of her comb. The only touch of color she wore was a scarlet flower in her hair. Its stem behind her ear, its bright petals peeped out discreetly from under the ivory lace. Her lashes were black and glossy and so long that they seemed to lie on the curve of her cheek as she looked down at the doves flying up toward her hands and pecking at her velvet pouch which held the corn seeds.

She was so close that, with only a slight gesture, she could have touched him, before she raised her eyelids and saw him. She did not start with surprise when she found herself almost upon the lean, tall, dust-covered figure where she had supposed herself alone. She stopped short, poised on her gliding toes, and looked at Lank Hardie, her head gradually lifting higher on its slender throat. The flush faded from her light olive skin, even her lips paled; her very large almond-shaped black eyes lost their natural velvety softness and became glassy with hostility.

Lank had been wondering if she could understand English and also just how he ought to speak; but her eyes, in which the glitter of hatred hardened

8 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

and intensified while he looked, stopped him. She spoke presently. She pronounced the English words slowly and carefully, with an accent odd to his ears; but the one Spanish word, which he did not understand, leaped at him with a throaty hiss.

"What—do—you—do—here, *Gringo*?"

His face, even the back of his neck, smarted from the agony of embarrassment which took possession of him. He stammered disconnected phrases about the fallen horse, the overturned wagon.

"Ah!" she cried, showing small, very white, pointed teeth in a cruel smile. "If *onlee* all *gringo* horses should die so, I would make a fence of their bones to keep out forever your bandit people from my California!"

"Bandit?" he repeated, blankly puzzled.

"*Sí!* You wish now to steal a horse from me! But I will not allow!"

"No, miss. I ain't no horse thief."

"*Sí!*" She stamped, her eyes flashing. "You come to see what we have so that the men who are with you can later, in the night, *steal!*"

He shook his head slowly, frowning in bewilderment.

"Ain't no men with me, miss. Only Tess." Her lids narrowed.

"Onlee Tess? Who is he?"

"Tess is my sister. She's down there with Josie. That's the horse. Way down in the field yonder where all the purty gold flowers grow. Tess is all tired out, too; an' she hoped the folks up here'd let us camp in the field, coz of the flowers. She's littler 'n me an' younger, an', bein' a girl, she ain't so strong."

"How old?" She interrupted him, with a haughty gesture.

"Tess is most fifteen. An' it's ben a terrible long hard trip. What made it longer an' harder was father gettin' so sick—"

"Ah! You spoke a lie when you said you brought no men! There is a father! Soon there will be also uncles! I know these *gringos*!" She hurled the angry sentences at him.

"No, miss. He—he died—back there a ways—on the desert. An' we buried him—back there on the desert." He repeated the words huskily, and looked away. "Tess broke all up when—" He paused. "We jes' drove on, coz we had ter go

10 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

some place. We couldn't go back where we come from."

"Look at me!" she commanded sharply. He turned his eyes to hers, which were wide with an expression almost of horror. "You tell me a girl almost fifteen—I am almost fifteen—cries in the field because the horse is fallen down, and the father is dead on the desert? You tell me the *truth*?"—passionately.

"Yes," he said. "You see—"

"Oh, what a stupid *gringo*!" she snapped her fingers at him. "How long you stand there saying *nothing*! Talk, talk, yet say nothing!" Tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. "Wait!" She dashed away from him and into the house.

He was still staring at the door, his thoughts moving helplessly in a maze, when she came running back with a cloak about her, and almost dragging a handsome boy, shorter than herself, by the hand.

"He is my older brother, Don Ernesto," she said, breathlessly. The boy bowed, ceremoniously.

"Howdy, mister," Lank said, coloring again from an inner prick which was new to him and painful. He had never felt before that he was any one's in-

ferior; but a vague sense of inferiority had stabbed him here to-day.

"My brother speaks also the English, yet not so well as me. You ride with him on his horse. It is the black one. I ride by myself on the white horse, which is my own. We go immediately to the poppy field for your sister."

"It's mighty kind of you," he stammered. She waved him to silence.

"You were very stupid not to tell me immediately of your great sorrow. Ah, the grave alone on that great lonely desert!" New tears glistened on her lashes. "Ernesto?" She inclined her head slightly toward her brother; her small hand moved in a gesture of deference.

The boy stepped forward and bowed again.

"Señor," he said, "in the absence of my father, Don Vicente de Soto, I offer to you the hospitality of La Hacienda de las Flores de Oro—The Ranch of the Golden Flowers. You and your sister will confer honor upon us and give us joy when you become our guests." He extended a slim, hard, brown hand.

Lank shook it awkwardly. Again that new sense pricked him. Something was expected of him—

12 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

what, he did not know; but he felt that he *ought* to know. He was still stammering "Thank yer"—and "Mighty kind" as he mounted behind Ernesto.

The girl swung her Arab alongside of her brother's. She spoke to him in Spanish. It was just as well that Lank Hardie could not understand her words.

"All *gringos* are of a vulgar caste. These two, also, you will see, are persons of no breeding nor culture whatever. Yet, for a *gringo*, this young man has not an evil face."

"It is, of course, necessary to offer them our home while they are in trouble," Ernesto replied. "Let us hope they will not repay our hospitality by robbing us, as their countrymen have done."

CHAPTER II

TESS MEETS MUNITA

POOR old Josie had scrambled to her feet and stood cropping the grass at the water's edge. Tess was trying to gather into a heap some of the smaller articles which had scattered in the collapse of the wagon. The sack of flour had burst. It spilled white dust among the golden poppies as she attempted to lift it. However, she managed to save half of it by tumbling it into an iron pot. The chairs had been too old for travel before they set out from Kansas. They were done for, like the wagon wheels. The feather mattress was none the worse; and the pots and the tin cups, knives and so forth, and the few bars of soap which had been made just before leaving home, would still do duty. The plow was unhurt; also the churn. Tess was examining the rifle, which had been her father's, when Lank called to her.

She looked up, to see the riders reining in. Her

14 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

gaze fixed on the young girl, so strangely garbed, with a scarlet flower against her cheek and silken black hair curving on her brow under the scalloped edge of heavy white lace.

"Oh!" she said, softly; and her eyes shone again with the same joyous wonder which had kindled them at her first sight of the gold-embossed meadow.

The Spanish girl was quick to recognize the tribute and to respond to it. Her teeth sparkled in a smile and her face flushed deep rose with pleasure.

"See, Ernesto, she has also a good face, like the brother, but how much more beautiful!" she cried in Spanish.

She slid off her horse and grasped Tess's hands.

"You are welcome, señorita—miss," she corrected herself. "We are of the same years, but I am more tall—is it not so? Ah, how blue the eyes! How are you named? I am Munita."

"I'm Tess Hardie," Tess stammered, blushing.

"Tess Hardie," Munita repeated slowly after her. "How does one spell this name in the English?"

Tess spelled it for her.

"Tess 'Ardie. Oh, no, no! *Har*-die. Always I

am deceived by this so peculiar English fashion to pronounce the *h*! In Spanish there are both the *j* and the *g* to make this same sound. In Spanish we would spell your name J-a-r-d-i. How much more sensible is the Spanish! Ah, how blue the eyes! Like two blue flowers that do not ever wither. This is my brother, Ernesto. Our father is Don Vicente de Soto."

Tess blushed crimson as Ernesto formally kissed her hand.

"And your brother, he is also named Hardie?" Munita asked.

"Yes. His first name's Jefferson. Only he's allus called Lank. I guess coz he *is* lank, bein' so long an' thin."

"It does not insult him to be called so?" Munita queried.

"No, miss." Lank answered for himself, coloring a little at this personal attention, but smiling his slow amused smile. Munita dimpled and flashed with mirth.

"I will call you always 'Don Lank'."

"Do not trouble more yourself, señorita, for the carriage," said Ernesto, courteously. "And not also for these matters that are here spilled. We

16 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

will send servants to attend. Also the horse. Permit that I assist you to the saddle of my sister."

Blushing from the same sense of awkwardness, of inadequacy, which had afflicted her brother, Tess silently allowed Ernesto to lift her to the back of Munita's white Arab.

"He's a awful nice horse," she said, shyly. "What's his name?"

"I call him the Running Dove, because he is so white, like a white dove. Yet he runs and flies not; because he has the feet instead of the wings."

"It's a purty name." Tess sighed. "Yer think poor Josie'll be all right?" she asked. She was trying, vaguely, to liken Josie to some bird. Then she gave it up. Josie resembled no bird. Josie was only a Kansas homesteader's work horse.

"Oh, *sí*! We will send some of the *indios* to bring everything, also Josie. I can spell this Josie in English because it is almost like Jones. And that is the name of the lady who has taught to our family the English tongue. She is the Doña Hep-zee-bah Jones Milton; but this Epseebah is at once a name verree deeficult and ooglee"—Munita's accent became less English and more Spanish the longer and faster she talked—"so we say always, more simplee,

Doña Jones; but I weesh always we could be permitted to pronounce this J-o-n-e-s as in the Spanish, because the sound of Ho-ness is so more pleasant in the ears than this English Jones. Do you not agree?"

"Yes," said Tess, obediently, not getting the point.

"You see how Running Dove brings us verree soon home," Munita said presently. "Here is our house to which we are 'appee to give you welcome."

Tess slipped to the ground and leaned against a pepper tree. Her slim little body was weak from weariness. She pushed off her sunbonnet and let it hang down her back. Her head felt cooler and freer without it. She was dimly aware that, in response to sharp exclamatory orders from Munita, strangely dressed, very dark-faced men moved about slowly, taking the horses away, setting off for the meadow. But her eyes saw clearly only the floating color above the green stems of the garden. Her ears were filled with the sounds of doves—their cooing murmur and the twanging fiddlestring noise of their wings.

"Ah! How it is beautiful, the hair!"

Munita was fingering the ash-blond braid that

18 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

drooped over her left shoulder. Tess smiled at her faintly.

"I—I guess I'm—tired." Her lips quivered. She pressed them tightly together.

"Ah! It is the long journey that tires you. But now you will never be tired, no more. In California it never 'appen to tire! Oh, never! Come. I take you to my room so that you can prepare yourself a little. And then you will also drink a cup of chocolate. It will refresh. Ernesto takes your brother, Don Lank."

Tess followed her through the large room into which the door opened, and out of a door opposite into a green and floral patio, with a stone-rimmed pool in the center of it. As they passed the pool, a small turtle scrambled out of the water and lay on the stone. Tess exclaimed at it delightedly.

"Her name is Juliet. I give her this name because she sits on her balcony like *Juliet* in the Shakespeare which Doña Jones reads to me," Munita informed her.

"Oh," said Tess. Her knowledge of Shakespeare was vague.

"To-morrow, as always, we will eat the breakfast in the arbor and then you will see also some other

characters very notable in the history. But I do not tell you everything now. Come."

"I never seen a house like this," Tess said, taking Munita's hand obediently and allowing herself to be led through this strange place. She looked curiously at the huge adobe square, one story in height except in the front, which enclosed the large patio. Doves were stepping about in groups on the red terra-cotta tiles of the roof.

"Always we build so, in California. Here is *my* room."

Munita opened a door and led her into a square room which contained a bed, a washstand, a chair, a mirror, and a carved chest. A narrow window partly screened by vines made the place almost dusk. The air was very cool, and sweet with the scent of blossoms.

"My! It's lots colder in here!" Tess exclaimed.

"The thick walls protect from the sun. In the house we are never too hot. Sit on the chair while I arrange for your comfort. First you will wish to wash away this dust from the desert which so unkindly burns the skin, like the points of pins very hot." She filled the dark metal basin from a terra-cotta jar on the floor. "I have also a comb and a

20 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

brush for the hair. There will be dust in the hair too, in spite of the covering—do you call it a hat?—which you wore on your head. It is not like Spanish hats, nor the English hat of Doña Jones.” She removed Tess’s clumsy sunbonnet and laid it on the chest, with an air of distaste. “This bad dust is so small and sharp, it pierces all coverings. Ah, what a fair skin! So white!” Tess was rolling up her sleeves.

“I guess my dress is awful dirty. But the other one is down to the wagon. Guess *it’s* purty dusty, too,” she added. Maybe there was some place where she could wash it to-morrow?

Munita raised her eyebrows.

“We have laundresses. It is purely their affair,” she said. “But now, you must remove this dress altogether, so that I can wash this bad dust from your shoulders. In the chest I have a dress for you to wear until the laundresses shall make yours clean. *¡Sí! Sí!* I insist.”

Tess blushed and protested but her imperious hostess soon had it off.

“What is life worth when the clothes are so ugly!” Munita exclaimed in Spanish, as she tossed the faded, dusty, cotton dress on the floor near the

chest. She brushed the sunbonnet off on to the dress. The expression of her face, and of her scarcely less expressive hands, told that she despised these garments. Presently she was busily mopping Tess's shoulders. Then she draped them with the towel.

"Now I disbraid your hair," she said, her fingers already at work. "We Spanish love very much the blond hair," she chattered on, as she began to brush. "Yours is very fine; like silk. *Muy bonita!* It breaks the fine hair to make so tight the braids. I will make beside the ears two—two"—she pursed her lips, frowning—"two *cakes!*" She laughed merrily. "I forget sometimes the words. *Si!* Two verree soft cakes! Afterwards in one cake I will place a rose, or perhaps a jasmine. Ah! Now this so lovelee gold 'air is seen to be trulee the soft 'air of a young girl and no more looks like a *reata!*"

"What's that?" Tess asked.

"*Reata?* It is braid tightlee of the skin of cows; and with it the *vaqueros* snare the cows. Our ranch has much cows. Ah, *now* I bring the dress!"

She flitted to the chest, lifted its heavy, carved lid with effort, and rummaged in its depths excitedly. Tess turned in her chair and watched her. She would have felt more at ease if she could have put

22 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

on her own shabby frock again. But she did not venture to suggest it. Munita seemed to be the sort of person one did not oppose.

"See! I have a white with blue flounce. It will become you. The blond and the white, the blue flounce and the blue eyes! Also a blue *rebozo*! You must also try to fit the feet with the slippers and the stockings."

Munita came tripping back with her arms and hands full. Tess had barely time to gasp at the lovely stuffs, unlike anything in her experience, before the white billows descended on her. Her faint "Oh!" was lost inside.

"It is too long. What matter? I will pull it high around the waist and tie the blue sash verree *verree* tightlee!" She was satisfied at last, when the lowest ruffle spread wide just above Tess's ankles. Fortunately the blue velvet slippers, tied with ribbons, and the white stockings went on easily.

"They don't look like they was made ter walk round in," Tess said, contemplating the blue velvet shoes with awe. She rose and stepped gingerly at Munita's command.

"Now stand still. I arrange the *rebozo*. The arms *thus*!"

Tess stood motionless, posed as directed, while Munita draped the gay scarf above her body in its characteristic graceful and coquettish lines. The last touch was a cluster of white fragrant flowers from the window vine to droop over one ear.

"Now the mirror!" Munita led her swiftly to it. "Ah! Confess to me that you are truly lovelee! Ah, *muy bonita! Muy bonita!*" She clapped her palms softly, in delight at her handiwork.

Tess looked long at the image in the glass. Her eyes widened and shone. Her breath came unevenly. The same bright ecstasy, which she had felt at her first sight of the golden flowers, flooded through her. But presently she drooped again into the bent, angular pose that hard labor gives to young bodies. She turned slowly toward Munita. Her lips quivered, her eyes were wistful.

"'Tain't me," she said, sadly. "I'm jes' plain Tess Hardie what never *seen* a fine dress. I couldn't never *really* look like that. 'Tain't me."

Munita's sparkling face softened. Of another race, and bred in the aristocratic tradition of ease and plenty, she had not the faintest conception of the life of toil and poverty in Kansas from which Tess had come—nor of the pennies, so hardly won

24 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

for a few yards of new "caliker" when the old dress could no longer be patched into a semblance of decency. But she had the penetrating sympathy, the subtle quick comprehension of a mood, which is typical of the Spanish mind. And she saw that hurt pride mingled with some wounding memory to dash her guest's spirits. She threw her arms round Tess's neck.

"But yes, it is you, *querida*! How 'appy we shall be now because we can always together share all things what we 'ave!"

Tess's eyes brightened, but her smile was a little rueful as she answered.

"I guess yer wouldn't want my sunbonnet an' I ain't got nothin' else ter give yer."

"*¡Sí! Sí!*" Munita protested. "I am Spanish. And when you give to Spanish a thing beautiful, like Tess 'Ardie in blue with white, then you give to us what Spanish think better worth than all other things. Ah, 'ow my Mamma will be pleased! Come, we go to Mamma and Doña Jones for chocolate." She took Tess's hand.

CHAPTER III

A CALIFORNIAN WELCOME

“**H**AVE yer got a mommer?” Tess asked, a little surprised. “Mine died long ago. Mebbe that’s partly why I thought yer hadn’t none. An’ not seein’ her round when we come in the house.”

“Always when our father, Don Vicente, is absent, Mamma sleeps not only in the siesta but all the afternoon until the chocolate is served.”

“Is she sick?” Tess looked sympathetic.

Munita’s eyebrows rose. “Seeck? No! In California nobody is seeck. California does not permit.”

“Californy must be lots different from Kansas, where we come from. When yer go ter bed day-times in Kansas it’s coz yer too sick ter sit up.”

“What a ’orrible country!” Munita shuddered. Her thoughts leaped back to momentary contemplation of the detestable calico dress and sunbonnet which had obscured her guest’s delicate loveliness.

26 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Out upon the country that produced such clothes! "Ah! It is good that you are now come to California!" she exclaimed. "You are surprised because Mamma sleeps in the day. It is our Spanish custom, and especially wise in 'ot countries. After the mid-day meal, in the 'eat of the day, we sleep for one, or for two, hours. Or if we do not really sleep, we lie very quiet in our cool rooms. It is the custom of Mamma to rest all the day when our father is away because this 'elps to keep 'er always very young and beautiful. Alas! I can never be so beautiful as Mamma." She sighed.

While they talked they had been walking slowly along the wide corridor which bounded the patio and on to which the house doors opened. The corridor had many arches and a high rail which, here and there, gave way to an open space to allow egress to the patio. Through the arches, Tess caught a glimpse of heads. People were seated in a distant angle of the corridor.

"Already Don Lank is there with Ernesto. And can you not see, too, the 'igh gray 'air of Doña Jones?" Munita gestured toward the group eagerly. "Doña Jones is not so beautiful as good. I confess this only to you, because it is not good manners

in Spanish to say aloud that a woman is not beautiful. Rather one avoids the subject, and speaks always of the noble character. It is a great sorrow to me, and also to Mamma, that Doña Jones, whose face is long, draws the 'air up so tight, like a skin, to the *veree* top of the 'ead and there twists it so 'ard and so small it resembles the shell of the snail. You will see." She sighed. "Ah, but what a noble character!"

Tess looked curiously at the very tall thin woman who came forward to greet her. La Doña Jones Milton might have been fifty and she was certainly not beautiful. Her head was, as Munita had said, very long and her unbecoming coiffure emphasized its length as well as the size of her well-shaped Roman nose. Her teeth, of the sort usually described as "squirrel teeth," were never quite hidden by her lips. Her complexion was ruddy and her round, rather prominent eyes were, in color, a clear pale gray. She wore a thin black dress, the skirt ruffled in black, which did nothing to disguise the spare and stiff lines of her figure. A narrow black thread-lace mantilla, placed at the back of her snail-like knot, dangled gracelessly. Her wrists were decked with black cameo bracelets and there

28 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

were earrings and a brooch to match. In common with most Englishwomen of her caste, her arms and her large hands were finely formed. Unbeautiful in any garb and setting, her resolutely racial type was rendered almost grotesquely ugly by the alien style of her dress and background. Yet there was about this curious figure an unmistakable air of good breeding and dignity; and the expression of firmness and straightforwardness on the calm features counseled the stranger to put his trust, nothing doubting, in Doña Jones.

Unconsciously Tess clung to the large, firm, cool hand which enveloped hers. From the moment when she had turned an angle of the dusty hills and spied the splendid fields of the Hacienda de las Flores de Oro, through the incredible sequence of Munita in white lace on Running Dove, the queer great house, the blue velvet shoes, Tess Hardie of Kansas had felt herself astray in Wonderland. The sight of Doña Jones's placid Anglo-Saxon face, the sound of her English speech, though not accented as in Kansas, restored her faith, so to speak, in the solidity of the earthen substance under the miraculous blue slippers. This new world was strange, but it was real; it would not melt from her view as the

lovely forests and castles of frost had melted from the windowpanes of a Kansas cabin.

"Come, my dear child, and sit down. No doubt you are tired and so you will enjoy your first taste of Spanish chocolate." Leading Tess to a seat at the table, she continued: "I have also ordered hot buttered toast in the English fashion, as I have done almost daily for the past seventeen years. The cooks seem unable to learn. But I persevere, since it is not my way to acknowledge defeat. Even in California, patience may at last work wonders."

Her contralto voice had that double resonance—"calling across heather"—peculiar to north-country dwellers in Britain, which made its low-pitched tones slightly resemble the boom of a drum and carry far.

"I guess I'm purty hungry. I feel kinder gone," Tess said. All of a sudden she felt weak again, and a trifle dizzy. She drank eagerly from the cup of frothing chocolate. "It tastes real good. What d'yer reckon makes it frothy? Guess it's beat up a heap."

Doña Jones looked pained.

"Where were you born, my dear?" she asked.

"Kansas, ma'am. Allus lived in Kansas."

30 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Indeed. What is the native language of Kansas?"

Tess looked up from her chocolate in mild surprise.

"English, ma'am. Like me and Lank talks."

"Really? English? I wouldn't have believed it. English is also my native speech. While you are here, we must have many talks together, child. It will be interesting to agree as to which words are really English, and how they should be pronounced." She smiled kindly. She spoke in Spanish to Munita. "I warn you not to let me hear you imitating this girl's atrocious grammar and accent. I have never heard worse, even in London. I will correct her speech, however—until it is in harmony with her pretty face and her refined and modest expression."

Munita nodded, wide-eyed. She turned to Tess, smilingly.

"This so good Doña Jones is already your friend. What 'appiness for you!"

"Munita, in English the *h* in 'happiness' is not silent," Doña Jones reminded her.

"Happiness," Munita repeated, dutifully. "But truly, *querida* Doña Jones, how much more intel-

liger is the Spanish which has always the silent *h*! In California the Spanish is the stronger. Therefore it makes often the English *h* also silent." Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Never in my presence, dear," Doña Jones replied, serenely firm. Munita subsided.

During this exchange, Tess had been gazing silently at her brother. Lank had not spoken to her, nor let his eyes meet hers. His head was bent low over his plate. His face was red with a deep embarrassment that would not pass. He devoted his whole attention to the task of preventing spots from falling on his borrowed raiment. They were gorgeous clothes. Tess could not help staring at them, and at Lank in them, although she knew that he was sullenly forbidding her.

Lank, plainly, saw himself as the world's jest. Ernesto had taken away his patched overalls, his dust-eaten shirt, his disrupted boots. From his own wardrobe he had produced a short plum-colored velvet jacket and a large silk kerchief, which made a broad sash for Lank's waist. Being shorter than Lank, he had acquired the trousers from the wardrobe of his father, the absent Don Vicente. His own would never have fitted those long limbs. They

32 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

were of black velvet slashed wide over the instep and laced with gold cord. The shirt, Don Vicente's, was of the finest and snowiest linen. A pair of Don Vicente's slippers, of red leather, completed the costume in which Lank Hardie sat bowed and crimson with shame over a silver cake plate and a silver chocolate cup. Fortunately his hosts attributed his mood to shyness among strangers. Ernesto chattered gayly to him, telling him incidents of Californian life, tactfully pursuing subjects which demanded no verbal contributions from the embarrassed guest.

Evidently it rankled in Munita's proud and imperious Latin soul that she had been rebuked before a stranger; for presently she said:

"I am always so grateful that you have taught to me the English, Doña Jones. I wish I could speak it with the English and not with the Spanish accent."

"In time I hope you will. Pure English is as necessary as pure air."

"Ah, truly! Yet when you speak the Spanish, *querida* Doña Jones, you speak it with not its own accent, but with the English. Is that not the same thing that I do?"

"It is hardly of the same importance, my dear. Correct English marks one as a lady and a person of culture," said Miss Jones Milton of the British Isles. Munita had never, perhaps, heard the term "insularity" but she knew the quality. She succumbed.

At that moment gay Spanish tones assailed them from the doorway. Ernesto and Munita sprang up, with enthusiastic replies. A small plump woman stood on the threshold, enveloped in an enormous shawl of dull gold lace, fringed and trailing. Her flawless skin, unmarked by a line of age, was creamy; her lips were vivid. Her dazzling eyes were bronze, rather than brown; so were the thick waves of her hair, showing under a mantilla caught in place by a towering amber comb. She looked twenty, though she was thirty-four.

"It is Mamma!" Munita cried to Tess. "Ernesto is telling her about you and Don Lank."

Mamma came forward now and shook hands with Tess and Lank. She offered her soft cheek to Doña Jones and seated herself at the table, chattering excitedly the while about the advent of the Hardies. With a roguish grimace she rejected the toast, and helped herself to the small sweet cakes. She

34 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

watched Doña Jones pour a cup of chocolate for her from the huge silver pitcher, with an expression as naïvely eager as a child's.

"Mamma speaks the English not at all," Munita confided to Tess.

"Not spik." Mamma confirmed the statement, nodding brightly and dipping her cake. Between sips and bites, she plied Ernesto with questions.

"Mamma will never learn either the languages or whatever is in books," Munita went on. "She believes that all education is bad for women because it makes the wrinkles." She interrupted the conversation of the others to let her mother know what she had just told Tess.

Mamma turned to Doña Jones, her eyes mournful and reproachful, her hands flung wide, palms up, in a gesture of helpless resignation.

"Alas, that you do not agree, dear friend, but continue to imperil my adored Munita's future happiness!" she exclaimed, sadly. "It is true. All education is bad because it forces one to think and to read. Thinking puts lines in the brow and reading steals the brightness from the eyes. Only three things are necessary for a woman: to be beautiful, to be beloved, and to give joy. A man's life is lived

in the world. But a woman's life is lived only in the hearts of those she makes happy. My poor Munita!" she gave her attention again to Ernesto, demanding an explanation. "Kansoos? *Qué es Kansoos?*"

In another moment she had leaped to her feet, with cries of delight, and was running along the corridor.

U. S. 706579

"It is our father. Mamma is so happy that he has returned," said Munita.

Tess turned to look interestedly at the new arrival, asking:

"Has he ben away long?"

"Oh, yes! since this morning. The other is our uncle, Don Silencio."

Two tall men came round the farther angle of the long corridor. Mamma flung herself into the arms of the foremost, then put up her cheek to the other. She stopped them there to tell them the story of "these beautiful blond children." She told it dramatically, with gestures, with eyes that distended with amazement or softened with tears. The blond children had come from Kansoos. It was a place where very poor people lived in very small huts made of wood with the bark on. It snowed

36 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

there in winter—ah! she shivered. There were immense rocks which prevented the olives and oranges from growing. This was her version of what Lank had originally told Ernesto about the soil on their small farm being sandy and pebbly. They had come thousands of miles in a wagon wearing clothes that Munita, who had actually seen them, pronounced to be horrible, particularly the girl's hat. The father had been sick for a long time and he had died on the desert. She wept against Don Vicente's shoulder. Ernesto assured her that the cart held nothing of the slightest value to any one—some chairs of common wood, not rush nor tapestry, some kettles such as "our *indios* use in the kitchen!" The horse was evidently of a poor breed, such as no gentleman would ride. Ah, the tragedy of this lonely death! And afterwards these two beautiful blond children coming on day by day alone—in peril of bandits, no doubt, and lions and tigers, or, if not tigers, then big bears at least—what courage! It was not just that youth should know peril and sorrow. God intended the young to be happy. "I have said to both Ernesto and Munita this: Above all things, and the *first* thing in your hearts, *you must make them happy!*"

With that, Mamma came back to the table, her hand in her husband's.

"You should call my father Don Vicente and our uncle—who is also Mamma's uncle—Don Silencio. And Mamma, Doña Emilia," Munita said, hastily.

Both men greeted Lank and Tess with warm handshakes and courteous words of pleasure at their coming. They spoke English with an accent, but fluently. Doña Jones poured their chocolate and Mamma picked out sweet cakes for her husband. Don Vicente was over six feet, broad-shouldered, very dark, with a black mustache and small pointed beard. Don Silencio was as tall but of a slenderer, more wiry build; his small eyes had a greenish cast, like Ernesto's, his hair and mustache were sandy. He devoted respectful attentions to Doña Jones. In a few moments Don Vicente's tact had made Lank forget his embarrassment, and he was talking easily about what he wanted to do in California.

Under cover of this conversation, Munita softly pinched Tess's arm and then whispered in her ear.

"Doña Jones and our uncle are always engaged. It is a so very romantic affair! When we are alone, I will tell you all!"

CHAPTER IV

TESS AND LANK ARE ADOPTED

“**B**UT you came not alone, surely?” Don Vicente asked Lank.

“No, mister. There was quite a lot of us started from Kansas an’ Missouri. A lot of wagons. Mr. Carson showed us the road. He brought some other trains in before. He was a good man ter go with, Kit Carson, coz he knowed the Injuns on the perairies where we’d have ter cross. An’ he got us through all right. Not all of us. Some got sick in camp before we started an’ they didn’t come through.”

“Your father—” Don Vicente’s voice was sympathetic.

“No. Dad warn’t exactly sick then. He never was real strong an’ our land was poor an’ we had ter work hard. It took his strength, I reckon. We heard soil was rich in Californy an’ the climate awful good fer health; an’ Dad started with Tess an’ me, with our wagon an’ horse an’ the cow an’ calf, an’

our goods. The cow an' calf died; like lots of the other settlers' cattle did after we got west a piece. Funny thing about cattle, mister. Even after we ben on the trail weeks, they'd turn back, break away, tryin' ter head fer home again. Some ate a weed an' died. Must of ben poison. There was extry horses ter help pull. Mr. Carson brought plenty horses, coz he knowed how things would be. If he hadn't done that, some folks would have had ter jes' stop an' die on the perairie when their horses died an' couldn't pull their wagons. There was a man an' two women died. When we come near the mountains, Dad was real sick. Mr. Bridger an' some trappers met us a piece back. An' Dad got friendly with 'em. An' that's why we stopped with 'em in their camp all winter, coz Dad couldn't make the crossin'. He felt better when spring come; an' the trappers took us through the mountains. They traveled with us till they had ter branch off ter a town—ter buy stuff, I reckon. Then Dad died. An' Tess an' me come on. Warn't nothin' else ter do."

"The character of this young man is very fine," Don Silencio said, in Spanish.

"Yes," Don Vicente agreed. "His eyes are bold and straightforward in expression; his lips firm and

40 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

courageous. The young girl also has this same air of natural dignity. One wishes to help them, not alone from motives of compassion, but because one feels respect."

"And because they are blond," said Mamma, very positively, between nibbles.

Don Silencio, pulling his mustache, quoted reflectively:

"*'El buey que me acornó en buen lugar me echo.'*"

"I have always said you are too fond of proverbs," Doña Jones said, with her characteristic rather dry smile. "However, in the case of these children your quotation is apt. But it is by no means *always* true that the ox which gores one throws one into a better place."

"The new place is better than the horns!" Mamma giggled.

"Don Silencio quotes a proverb or invents a phrase for every situation in life. In fact life, to him, is simply material for his wit. The universe has only the value of a clever line! Such a man may appear to live but, in reality, he experiences nothing!" said Doña Jones, reprovingly.

Observing the soft glint of humor in Don Silencio's eyes, her own became severe.

"Wit is the spice of life, but experience is often dull eating," he remarked.

Don Vicente laughed.

"How is it that two such devoted friends can never agree, yet always remain devoted?" he asked. He resumed his conversation in English with Lank.

"So, then, you came to California in the hope to find a farm?"

"Yes, mister. Farmin's the only thing I know. Tess, too. We had ter start when we was right small helpin' with the chickens an' the cows, an' weedin'; an' then the plowin' an' seedin' an' mowin'. Tess an' me can git along all right if we can find a piece of ground. The climate's easy here an' we could live in a tent till I git the cabin built. I reckoned, too, if I couldn't git the piece of ground right off, mebbe I could help farm fer somebody an' git wages; an', bimeby, pay fer the ground? Tess is jes' crazy fer me ter git a piece down below where she seen the purty flowers like gold." He studied Don Vicente's face with anxious, questioning eyes.

"Ah! This matter of the land for you is not to be decided too quickly. We must think about it so as to do the best. In the meantime you and your sister will be our guests. Our house is yours, señor."

42 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Lank colored and shifted awkwardly.

"It's awful kind of yer, Mister Soto," he stammered. "But me an' Tess couldn't jes' stay on here, livin' off yer an' doin' nothin' fer it. We're poor, sure 'nough, but we ain't beggar trash."

"I do not wish to offend your pride—which I respect," his host answered, with formal courtesy. "But if you will also respect mine, you will not then refuse my hospitality." He smiled. "That, señor, is a grave offense to a Californian. We have our big ranches—mine extends fifty miles from the house in three directions and ten miles north to the little village—we have, I repeat, our big ranches and our houses with many rooms, and our herds of sheep and horses, so that our friends may come to visit us, ride and eat at their pleasure, and never feel the need of leaving us. There is plenty for all. And a Californian is happiest when he sees the horses of travelers galloping to his door."

"Californians must be awful good-hearted," Lank said, simply.

"And why not? How could they be otherwise? Here the sun and the soil give to us so generously! If we were not glad to share it, we should be ungrateful. But no! Under the constant rays of our

Californian sun the cold heart melts. And the liberal earth of California forces the narrow heart to expand."

Lank sat silent for some moments, his head bent, staring at his calloused hands clasped between the knees of the borrowed velvet suit. Don Vicente had made him understand that he was not being offered "charity." No, the Californian's hospitality to the poorer stranger was inspired by a different feeling. Lank was sensitive enough to realize the difference. It warmed and stirred him. He liked Don Vicente without reservations from that moment.

"He's a good man. He's *right*," he thought.

And thinking his host a "right" man, Lank wanted in his turn, to be understood by him. But he was naturally a silent boy, shy and reserved; and words came with difficulty to his tongue.

"I reckon I see how yer mean it, Mister Soto," he said at last. "'Tain't the way I thought it was. I'd like yer ter see what I feel about acceptin' yer kindness. Mebbe I can be some use on the ranch, coz I got the plow an' rakes, an' Josie fer a work horse, if she ain't done fer by the trip. Seems ter me, I got ter be independent. An' Tess, too. Coz we was raised ter work an' never ter git nothin' we

44 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

didn't earn. It kinder knocks us plain Kansas folks off our feet, bein' took in a grand house like yers, an' bein' dressed up in fine clothes like we never even seen in all our lives before."

"But these are the ordinary clothes of a Californian gentleman. We do not consider them fine!" Don Vicente protested gayly.

"They ain't the ordinary clothes of a Kansas farmer," Lank replied, with his rare slow smile. "I never seen velvet pants in the cornstalks back home. Now, I'm sort of tryin' ter say somethin'—Well, I reckon this is about it. When folks has been raised our way, ter work an' *deserve* what they git, it wouldn't be good fer 'em ter sit down an' be fed by hand. They'd lose what character they got. They'd soon be plumb wuthless, Mister Soto. I'll be awful glad ter stay on yer ranch, if 'twasn't fer nothin' else but jes' so Tess would have a home an' be safe. But yer must let me work here, Mister Soto. Coz I got ter live so I kin respec' myself the way I learned in Kansas. An' that means workin', an' givin' back *somethin'* fer all I git."

"Come!" Don Vicente extended his hand. "Let us shake hands again—this time as friends, for we understand each other."

Lank, coloring crimson again, shook hands.

"If the soil of Kansas grows no pomegranates," Don Vicente said in Spanish to Don Silencio, "it produces character that is like good rock, bold and reliable." Don Silencio nodded.

"You are proud, and that is not a bad thing," Doña Jones said to Lank.

"I reckon I ain't proud, ma'am. Coz I got nothin' ter be proud about. Only it's kind of necessary ter me ter be able ter look Lank Hardie in the face without gittin' red as a beet—the way I'm doin' now," he added with a rueful smile, the color flooding to his hair roots again.

Mamma could not understand all the conversation; but the Spanish exchanges between her husband and his brother convinced her that it was becoming too serious. She flipped a tiny cake across the table, hitting Lank's cheek with it. He turned in sharp surprise to see her teeth flashing a smile at him and her marvelous brown eyes dancing with mischief.

"Por qué es una mujer deforme cuando está remendando sus medias?" she demanded.

Lank's brow wrinkled in perplexity at the question he could not interpret, though he laughed, un-

46 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

able to resist the infection of her mood. Munita clapped her hands excitedly.

"Oh! Oh!" she exclaimed. "Mamma asks you, Don Lank, 'Why is a woman deformed when mending her stocking?' It is a proverb."

"No. *A riddle*," Doña Jones corrected her.

"Yes! Yes! It is a reedle!"

Lank shook his head.

"I reckon I give it up," he said.

Ernesto leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Say to her in Spanish, 'Who knows?' She will be delighted. *Quién sabe?*"

"Kee-hen sabby?" Lank said, laughing and blushing.

Mamma shrieked with joy. "*Porque sus manos están donde debían estar sus piés!*"

"Because her hands are where her feet should be!" Munita translated.

Lank laughed.

"I was sure caught on an easy one that time," he said. "I got ter learn Spanish first thing, so *I* can ask *her* some riddles. Mebbe I'll catch her like she done me."

Mamma was in ecstasies when Munita had trans-

lated this. She shook her finger at her husband, Don Silencio, and Doña Jones in turn.

"You see! Am I not always right? You talk all serious things to this boy—about the Kansoos, the character like rocks, the dignity, the this and that and so forth! *Ojalá! Quiera el Cielo!* And this poor young boy grows always redder, like my geraniums from the bud to the flower. And fidgets, twisting the hands and the body, because all this seriousness is worse than the rheumatism! Then I throw a very little cake and I make a very little joke, but with laughter on my lips and love in my eyes. And at once he forgets both the rheumatism and the geraniums and also these terrible rocks—*Dios mío!* He becomes happy, like a young boy. He feels at home; so he says, 'I wish to learn at once the language of my new home!' Observe that it is I, a woman of no brains nor education, who have accomplished this good thing!" This last was said directly to Doña Jones. Then Mamma sighed, and smiled forgivingly.

CHAPTER V

ERNESTO HAS A NEW AMBITION

“FATHER,” said Ernesto, “I do not like to hear this *gringo* boy say that he can do so many things which I cannot do.”

“Oho! Are you jealous now, my son?” Don Vicente laughed.

“Why should you do them?” Mamma inquired. “You are not poor.”

“Remember, too, that you are a De Soto,” Munita said, her eyes snapping haughtily. “A gentleman does not work in the fields. There are Indians and other servants for such humble tasks. A gentleman does not cross the desert in such a coarse carriage full of ridiculous objects! I like our guests very much. But they are not of the aristocracy, as we are. They are only Americans.”

“All this is true,” Ernesto answered. “And I am not jealous, Father. But I think about it. And this

is what I think. I believe I am not less intelligent than this Kansas boy. Yet I could not do what he has done, although I can ride much better than he. Like all Californians, I can do as I will with a horse when I am on its back."

"Do not feel inferior," his father said kindly. "Think how different your experience has been from his."

"Ah, yes!" Ernesto's green eyes flashed. "But when I ask myself: What makes this great difference? Then I find no answer except that the *gringo* has always *worked*, and *I* have *never* worked!"

"*Ojalá!*" Mamma exclaimed, her eyes wide with alarm. "It is not possible that the mad passion for labor, which convulses many *gringos*, now seizes on my son? Ernesto, have you not heard that there are *gringos* who sleep *only at night*, and never take the siesta, even in midsummer? Undoubtedly there is a strain of insanity in that nation!"

"Let us hear what Ernesto wishes to do," Doña Jones suggested.

"Don Lank insists on working on the ranch," said Ernesto. "I intend to accompany him every day and to learn to do whatever he does."

"You will soon tire," Don Silencio remarked. "I

50 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

can imagine nothing less amusing than pushing a plow or pulling a weed. Even the Indians, who have not lively minds, fall asleep in the fields."

"Yes. They were asleep when that bad *gringo*, Ben Yellow, stole the hides and our sheep and horses," said Mamma.

"That is one more reason why I should learn these things. Don Lank would have been awake when the thief came," Ernesto answered.

"It is so extraordinary that you should wish to work!" Munita said scornfully. "Not only Don Lank, but also his beautiful sister, has done all the unimportant and uninteresting things which, it seems, are done on a farm in their own country. And she also has made the long journey and shown great courage. She also shoots the rifle as well as her brother. I hunt also. But I pity her because she has learned these other ugly things instead of dancing and playing the guitar and the art of dressing becomingly, and also how to speak the English correctly. But *I* have no desire to *imitate* her and learn all these unnecessary things which are here properly left to Indians! Therefore why does Ernesto wish to imitate her brother?"

Ernesto's straight black brows drew together in a

sullen frown. His whole face darkened as if a shadow had been cast there.

"She admires him because he can do these things, which she can do, but better than she can do them. She understands and so she respects him as a man. It is by these things only that she knows if a man is strong and intelligent and brave."

"Ah, now we begin to understand!" Don Silencio muttered. "We see what is left in the pot now that the meat is out!" His humor was undisturbed by the cold look which his proverb evoked from Doña Jones.

"Yes, yes! It is plain." Mamma agreed, with a tender sympathetic glance at her son. "Ernesto is justly accustomed to be more admired than any other boy in our valley."

"To say so is to repeat what even the wind knows!" Munita declared proudly.

"It would be intolerable to my pride if this young girl should consider me inferior to her brother. I, Ernesto De Soto, an inferior!" He bit his lip, and drummed his fingers rapidly on the table. Two red spots burned in his cheeks.

"But that would be absurd! Are you not known to be the best rider of your age in California? And,

52 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

indeed, what older man excels you? At the last fiesta did you not so astonish every one by your skill in the races that, not the girls alone, but also the older women, tore the flowers from their hair to pelt you with them? Never have I been so proud!" his loyal sister protested.

"This girl does not know horsemanship," Ernesto answered. "She would throw her rose, not in admiration, but only because she is kind. She would still think her brother more admirable. For me, all other roses would lose their perfume if but one person threw her flower out of mere kindness—to an inferior!"

"It is your nature not to endure rivalry in anything; and you are quite right." Mamma nodded vigorously. She laid her hand over his restless one and, by her light cool touch, stopped its drumming on the table. "Still, how amazing that this noble pride in you, which you inherit from your ancestors, should be the cause of your learning to work as a farmer! I am only a woman, and so I lose my balance when my world turns over! What esteem I shall have for you when my son is the best farmer as well as the best horseman in the world!" She beamed at him.

Ernesto's somber expression lightened. He bent and kissed her hands. His greenish eyes sparkled with appreciation.

"When Ernesto sets his will on any matter, nothing can be done about it by others. He is stubborn to the death!" Munita sighed.

"I am as I am," Ernesto admitted in a tone which suggested that he was not unsatisfied with himself.

"While you are learning from him to be a Kansoos," said Mamma, "you will do a kindness if you teach him the manners of a Californian. He is a good boy but he lacks the distinction and the poise of a true *caballero*. He does not know, even, how to kiss the hand! *Dios mío!*" Mamma's expressive eyes registered a deeply shocked state of mind. "And these blushes! Red in the cheeks is a woman's color. A young girl's rosy modesty is often very pretty. But a man in embarrassment—all wriggling and red like a newborn infant—is a spectacle that makes even the kindest heart stoop to ridicule. He will make the *caballero* a farmer. You must make the farmer a *caballero*. Yes!" She spoke the last words solemnly, emphasizing them with an impressive gesture.

54 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"You must pardon us that we speak so much in our own language." Don Vicente turned to Lank. "But, at chocolate, our family unites and each must tell his news. And this we must do in Spanish because my wife, Doña Emilia, does not speak English."

"Not spik!" Mamma echoed cheerfully. She met Lank's shy smile with the full flashing beauty of her eyes and teeth.

"You see?" she said to her husband. "He does not wriggle when I speak to him. Already he likes me very much."

"Who does not? Sorceress!" Don Vicente laughed.

Mamma nodded to him gravely.

"A little sorcery is a very excellent thing in life—above all in the home. Like good oil in the salad, it makes the whole dish taste."

Two Indian women came across the patio. One took away the chocolate service. The other set the table for supper with damask, silver-handled knives, silver forks and spoons, dishes and glasses, which she and her companion had brought in a large basket. An Indian boy came presently to carry away the basket and to fill the carafes.

"Do yer git water from the crick down whar the gold flowers grows?" Tess asked Munita.

"Oh, no! From the well."

Two men appeared now, hurrying and staggering under heavy steaming trays. They were goaded on by shrill orders from a stout gray-haired woman, who came behind with a basket of rolls. The two maids, who had set the table and removed the chocolate, reappeared with trays of oranges and nuts, jars of green and ripe olives, jellies and cheese.

"Ah! Here is our good Maruja with supper!" Don Vicente exclaimed.

"Good evening, Don Vicente," the woman answered in Spanish, bowing. "May God be with you, Doña Emilia. And with all. Yes. It is the supper, more delicious than ever before. Mutton with rice. Beans, large, fat, and brown, with garlic. A salad, most delicate. Bread only this moment from the oven. When it left my kitchen it was perfect, for I had cooked everything myself. But I know not if these stupid men have caused it to become ruined on the way. Such lazy lummoxes would loiter on the path until the food, that once was piping-hot, had become cold as the feet of a toad on one's bare back."

56 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

She paused to take breath, and to scream directions for the serving.

"Have faith in God and all will turn out well, my good woman." There was a twinkle in Don Silencio's eye.

"It is as you say, Don Silencio. Yet the faithful must be wise and watch that asses do not destroy what is provided for men. I forgot to mention that there is also honey."

"The mutton is perfect, Maruja," said Mamma. "And what beans!"

Maruja nodded slowly, accepted with a dignified air of satisfaction the compliment for which she had waited.

"It is a mercy from heaven that nothing is spoiled. But what happens in the kitchen while I am here? I return there with fear. My heart goes zigzag through my body like the running feet of a cockroach. For I left those two moonstruck ones, Pepa and Lázaro, to scrape the pots. The priest should marry them to-morrow instead of a month hence. Two fleas on a bell rope ring no chimes. Of the same use are two lovers in a kitchen. What I endure daily from their incapacity! Nature cursed them

with slow feet, and now love has put hobbles on them."

"Ah, fie, Maruja! Have you no sympathy for this beautiful glamour?" Don Silencio demanded.

"*Ay de mí!* Two snails crawl a lifetime on a wall, meet, and, because they lack intelligence to pass one another, perforce they rub their noses together, their horns catch, they become married! The spectacle brings no young dreams to my tired pillow. It wakes no romantic songs in my guitar. Good night. God remain with all of you."

"And go with you," Don Vicente answered in the accustomed phrase.

"Maruja is a hypocrite," Doña Jones said, with a sniff. "She is so fat and lazy now that she does almost nothing. Pepa baked the bread and Juana cooked the mutton."

"Oh, of course," Mamma replied blithely. "But poor Maruja fears that old age will cause us to put her aside and elevate one of these others in her place. So she must always talk to us of her importance. Dear Maruja."

"Do you like our food?" Munita asked Tess.

58 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Tess smiled contentedly.

"It's awful good. I reckon I was powerful hungry an' didn't know it."

"I knew it," said Lank, thankfully accepting a second helping of beans.

"Don Lank." Ernesto leaned across the table, his eyes sparkling eagerly. "Will you have the kindness to teach me to be a farmer?"

Lank looked up at him, puzzled.

"Don't yer know how ter farm?"

"No. On our big ranches we learn rather to ride, how to throw the *lazo* to catch the cattle; but not to plow and to plant and other things. I have told my father that I wish to be taught all this. And he has consented."

"Why—I'll be pleased ter"—hesitatingly. "Only, yer see, this ranch ain't like a Kansas farm. An' I got ter learn a lot, myself."

"Then I will go about with you all day and learn with you!"

"Yes. We can do that."

"And since you are now to become a Californian," Ernesto continued, "why should I not instruct you about California?"

Lank nodded slowly.

"Why do they look so serious?" Mamma asked Munita.

"They discuss!" Munita shrugged disdainfully. "This absurdity of becoming a farmer!"

"I do not like such gloomy faces. I will ask them both a riddle. Say that they must tell me what is the difference between an orange and a new-laid egg?"

Munita translated merrily.

"Come, we must really guess the answer!" Ernesto cried. "It will have something to do with the color of the yolk and the rind."

Lank turned an orange about in his hand, studying it.

"I reckon I ain't smart enough ter guess riddles—leastways not hers," he confessed. "I give up."

Ernesto tried a little longer. Then he, too, surrendered.

"We do not know," he said in Spanish.

"You are no farmers, if a hen can deceive you! You are only two sleepy little boys who must go to bed."

She watched Lank's face, while Munita delightedly interpreted.

"But it is a trick!" Ernesto protested indignantly

60 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
in English. Lank grinned at his own discomfiture.
Mamma giggled teasingly at both boys.

"And now to bed!" She rose, came round to Tess, and kissed her cheek. "*Buenas noches.*"

As they separated, uttering the customary benedictions and wishes for a sound sleep, each going towards his or her own room, an Indian girl slipped across the spot of silver in the patio and extinguished the ends of the candles still burning in the crystal candlesticks.

"*Buenas noches, Pepa,*" Mamma's voice called from her window near by.

"God give you sleep, Doña Emilia," the girl answered respectfully.

She went back across the patio as far as the fountain. She sat down on the rim in the shadow of the palm. Presently a man joined her and the muted sound of a guitar came out of the shadow. When the light in Doña Emilia's window was extinguished, the man ceased playing. The two figures, close together, moved away through the indigo and silver pattern of the night.

CHAPTER VI

PEACOCKS AND A FAMILY BREAKFAST

NEXT morning early Tess stepped out on the corridor and stopped short with a little cry of wonder and astonishment. There were birds in the patio such as she had never seen before.

"Munita! look! Oh, what *are* they?"

Munita came out quickly. Her eyes danced with pleasure at Tess's astonishment.

"Ah! *Los pavones!*" Munita exclaimed. "They are pretty, yes?"

Tess gazed, entranced, at a gorgeous peacock and his lady which strutted with slow proud paces across the grass. In their wake a yellow and green parrot seemed to be doing a grotesque imitation of their strut, although she was only walking in the natural fashion of parrots.

"These are Colón and Queen Isabella. In your language Colón is called Columbus. He discovered America, it is said, because Isabella of Spain gave all

62 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

her jewels to buy for him a ship, so that he could come and find it. Mamma says the emerald and turquoise and all the shining colors in his tail are the jewels of Isabella."

"Are they wild Californy birds?" Tess asked.

"Oh, no! They are not wild even in Mexico where these come from. They were a present for Mamma from cousins in Mexico. The parrot, also. Mamma named her *La Chismosa*. That is like you call in the English a woman who goes always about poking the nose in the affairs of the other persons and telling tales."

"A busybody!" Tess laughed delightedly. "I heard once that parrots can say words. Is it true?"

"But yes! Listen and soon you will hear. *La Chismosa* comes every morning to the door of the room of Mamma and calls her. Colón and Isabella know that when *La Chismosa* has called, Mamma will come out with some corn and scatter it. You see? As soon as the parrot arrives on the corridor, the peacocks turn back and also go to the same place."

"They're all friends," Tess said.

Munita made a shocked gesture.

"Ai! No! Colón and Isabella are too proud to—

co"—she paused, thinking hard—" 'obnob with *La Chismosa*, who is of the common people. Once upon a time the parrots were aristocrats, of the nobility. The great *conquistadores* gave them, with gold and jewels, to the Spanish kings and thus they were in the palace with Isabella and with those kings which came afterward. But, later, Mexico had a great revolution and there were no more viceroys and no more nobility with royal habits in Mexico. All was now for liberty and the common people. So the parrots also became of the common people. The kings did not welcome them now because the parrots no longer cried, 'May God preserve the King!' No. They had been taught to say, 'For Liberty and the People!' And it was too embarrassing for the King when the parrot, which sat on the top of the high golden back of his throne, shrieked, 'For Liberty and the People! Long live the Revolution!' Do you see?"

Tess giggled.

"So," Munita continued, "that is why Colón and Isabella do not speak with *La Chismosa* and do not have with her any social affairs. But they watch while she finds the corn and then they also eat it. That is because the kings, and the other great ones,

64 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

do not object at all to the golden corn which is discovered by common people."

"Oh! You made up that story, Munita!" Tess beamed. "I love stories; but I don't know more'n jes' a few."

"You must learn the Spanish verree quick. Then you can hear all the so amusing stories which Mamma composes. This that I have told to you about *La Chismosa* and the peacocks is a story of Mamma."

La Chismosa had now waddled sedately to the closed door of Mamma's room.

"Mamma! Mamma!" she squawked.

"Oh! Oh!" Tess breathed excitedly. "What a wonderful thing ter hear a bird talk."

"*Buenos días!* Mamma!"

The door opened and Mamma, in snowy muslin, came out. She called gayly to the two girls, then addressed the parrot.

"Good day to you, my dear Gossip!" Mamma said. She tossed a few grains of corn. The long necks of the peacocks darted down and the corn seeds were snapped up from under the nose of the slower-moving parrot. *La Chismosa* shrieked with fury. Her feathers stood on end. Mamma went

into a fit of laughter. She threw more corn, this time into the patio. As Colón and Isabella hastened toward it, Mamma picked up a short stick, which lay on her window sill. *La Chismosa* evidently knew its meaning; for, when Mamma extended it at about her own shoulder's height, Gossip flew up and perched on it. Mamma held up her other hand with the few remaining corn seeds in her palm.

"*Ole! Ole! Salve!*" The parrot announced her victory, then devoured the kernels.

"Come, we go now with Mamma to the arbor for breakfast."

Munita took Tess's hand. Tess gazed on the talking bird with glowing eyes, as she walked beside Mamma the length of the patio and out at the end, through a narrow sheltered arch, into a rambling back garden. Colón and Isabella preceded them, disdaining to notice the insults of *La Chismosa*, who yelled at them "Rogues" and "Get out!"

"*Pícaros! Largo de ahí!*"

The back garden stretched away in irregular waves of roses to fields of tall wild mustard. Beyond were the foothills, cobalt along their ridges, with patches of spring emerald on their flanks. The cloudless sky was a bright, deep turquoise.

66 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

There were pepper trees making a graceful canopy over a well. Two enormous bronze and dull green live oaks, their branches meeting, sheltered the breakfast table. To one side were several eucalyptus trees, one of them showing clusters of fuzzy scarlet blossoms in contrast to the pale yellowish flowers of the others. Their stiff silvery green saber-shaped leaves clicked in the light breeze. Their satiny trunks gleamed softly here and there where strips of bark hung down. Slovenly, yet graceful and of a pleasant sound, they resembled the untidy dancing women of the little cafés in the Spanish South—flowers in their hair, garments slipping, and castanets softly clicking.

The same band of servants went back and forth with dishes of fruit, rice, beans, and eggs. Maruja stood in the doorway of her kitchen screaming directions.

Don Vicente, Don Silencio, and Doña Jones were already at the table. And, in a few moments, Ernesto and Lank joined the group.

The two boys had been out in the fields since day-break. They were talking animatedly.

"Hullo, Tess," Lank greeted her. "Yer ought ter git out an' see this place. It's grand. We ben ridin'

round. I felt like a sack of oats on horseback every time I looked at Ernesto. It's a real sight ter see Ernesto ride a horse!"

Ernesto's eyes flashed their green sparkle, which was intensified by the odd contrast with his dark skin and jet-black lashes.

"I'd love ter see yer ride," Tess said. "Lank an' me never rode far an' we never rode fast."

"Here you will ride as Munita and I," Ernesto answered.

"We seen some cattle way off near the hills," Lank went on eagerly. "An' Ernesto says that off t'other way there's lots of sheep. An' there's horses, too." He grinned slowly. "Funny thing. When we woke up, Ernesto said, 'Let's take a ride.' An' I said: 'Yep. I'd like first rate ter look all over the ranch.' An' Ernesto said, laughin', 'It'd take about four days ter ride all over the Ranch of the Golden Flowers!' An' I believe him, too! Coz every time I'd ask who owns the land way off ter right or left, he'd say it was only another piece of Golden Flowers."

"One day we will go on our horses and journey over all the ranch," said Ernesto. "We will camp at night with the *pastores* and again elsewhere with

68 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

the *vaqueros*, and we will also see the hides which are to be put on the ship at Monterey. Pio Nahun, our man who attends to that business, has said there will be many hides."

Lank looked up from his plate interestedly.

"Do yer sell hides?"

"Yes," Don Vicente replied. "We sell the hides and the tallow. Also the wool of our sheep."

"An' milk an' butter an' cheese too, I reckon?"

"No. We use oil in the cooking. We do not make butter on our ranches in California. All the butter for our tables is imported. We send for it to Monterey, where it arrives by ship."

Lank looked puzzled.

"Don't it cost a lot ter buy that way?" he asked.

Don Vicente shrugged.

"Yes. It is a luxury. But some butter on the table is necessary for a perfect meal. Cheese also is imported and is very expensive."

"Yer could save a lot of money by makin' butter an' cheese," Lank said.

"It is never done," his host answered, indifferently.

Lank did not say anything more. But his face

wore a thoughtful expression as he applied himself silently to his breakfast.

"Have yer got lots of chickens?" Tess asked Munita, who was taking a second egg.

"Oh, yes! There are chickens. We have guests often. All our cousins come sometimes for all day. And Spanish people like very much to eat chickens."

"Do yer sell eggs, too? An' chickens?"

Munita made a gesture denoting her entire ignorance on that subject.

This time it was Doña Jones who answered, and with a grim little smile.

"No, my dear. And considering how few chickens are left, since the last visit of the cousins, we may expect very soon to begin buying eggs."

Tess exchanged a fleeting glance with her brother.

"Doña, you will be happy now that you have found new friends who are in sympathy with your Anglo-Saxon ideals of labor and thrift," Don Silencio said in Spanish.

"Labor! Thrift!" Mamma cried. "What horrid words! They are like slanders spoken against this beautiful land where everything we need is ours without trouble on our part." Then she smiled

70 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
radiantly at him. "But indeed, dear Uncle, I am glad you have spoken at last, for you have been as silent as your name."

"A silent fool is oft mistaken for a wise man, Emilia, and a closed mouth catches no flies," he answered, placidly.

"Proverbs!" Doña Jones sniffed. "The motto of your race, Silencio, might well be written as Proverbs and Pleasures!"

"Truly. For what is better than wisdom and joy?"

"Joy alone!" Mamma asserted gayly. "When there is wisdom, it often interferes with joy. And that is a very bad thing."

CHAPTER VII

DOÑA JONES EXPLAINS

AFTER the breakfast dishes had been cleared away, Munita went for their schoolbooks while the elder members of the family drifted into the house or the garden. Ernesto, who was dissatisfied with the condition of one of the horses, ran off to the stables.

"I hope he does not stay there all morning and forget entirely about his lessons," Doña Jones remarked. "And it is quite likely to take Munita half an hour to fetch the books. I have tried vainly to charge myself with the care of the lesson books, so that I could have them at hand at the proper hour. Time means nothing to the Spanish race! One hour will do as well as another for everything—except a horse race or a bull fight. However, they would consider it a disrespect to me to let me carry the books here every morning." She smiled. "So I sit and wait for them."

Lank's brow wrinkled.

72 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Yer can't farm without takin' account of time. Seedin', plowin', waterin' the stock, feedin', milkin'—it's all got ter be done on time."

Doña Jones sniffed, a cool placid mirth lightened her eye.

"Not in California, my lad; as you will soon find."

"Lank," Tess said, "we got the churn. I better start in makin' butter. Seems awful foolish ter pay fer butter on a ranch. I was thinkin' I could teach some of the hired help here ter churn. If the other folks in Californy don't make butter, we could sell it to 'em after we got the help learned how ter make it."

"Ought ter. But from what Mr. Soto said, seems like they don't milk."

"Mebbe they don't. But that's no reason why they shouldn't start doin' it now."

Doña Jones chuckled.

"My dear children," she said, "it will be so entertaining to watch your efforts to teach our lazy Indians Kansas farming methods!"

"Kansas farmers is mostly poor, Donyer Jones," said Lank. "They *got* ter make everythin' on the farm *pay*. Mebbe the Soto folks bein' so rich, it don't matter to 'em. Only, yer see, they've took me

an' Tess in, like real neighbors, an' we got ter show we're grateful—by doin' somethin' ter help. An' Ernesto's asked me ter teach him how ter farm. Donyer, we got ter do it right."

" 'Tain't right ter waste things, no matter if folks is rich," Tess put in.

Lank shook his head, thoughtfully.

" 'Tain't doin' right by the land," he said.

Doña Jones looked grave.

"Perhaps you young people have come in answer to prayer—my prayers for this family," she said. "Year after year I have seen them coming closer to ruin, without being able to influence or to help them."

"Ruin?" Lank stared.

"Yes. The De Sotos are no longer rich. They have land, to be sure. This is one of the largest ranches in California. But they have very little money. And they do not know what the word 'economy' means. Clothes from Madrid and Paris, silks, velvets, shawls, fine linen, laces; silver stirrups, silver mounting for the saddles and bridles. The pommel of Don Vicente's saddle is of solid silver, exquisitely carved by the finest workmen in Toledo—in Spain. The cost of it was enormous. He has

74 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
promised something like it to Ernesto, if Ernesto wins the prize at the next bull fight."

Lank looked stupefied.

"Silver harness?" he echoed. "An' no milk nor butter?"

"Is it jes' buyin' them things made Don Vicente poor?" Tess asked.

"I would not say so. I think their relations are as much to blame. Well, 'blame' is hardly the word. At any rate, it is a useless word to apply to human beings in California. Perhaps one should only blame the prodigal sun and soil which, by giving so freely, have robbed the natives of any sense of responsibility."

"Who are the relations, ma'am?" Tess asked.

"Most of the population!" Doña Jones sniffed. "You see, the De Soto branch is considered the head of the family. The name De Soto is noble and very old. De Sotos have been here since the beginning of settlement. They have married into numerous other families; and all these families look upon Don Vicente as the head. If some are too poor to have horses, they come to him for mounts. When any one of them has a birthday, they all come here to celebrate it. Don Vicente must provide not only all

the food they consume, but most of the presents which they give to the one who is having the birthday."

"But, Donyer," Lank interrupted, "that's jes' terrible. He's awful generous. But 'tain't right."

"Oh, right!" Doña Jones said despairingly. "Never talk to a Californian about right! The answer is always, 'It is our custom!' I assure you that a Californian would consider himself no gentleman, a base creature without proper pride, if he did not take care of his poorer kinsmen, and his wife's too, and all *their* poor in-laws!"

"But with all the big ranches, an' all the cattle an' sheep ter herd, there oughter be plenty work fer poor relations. They could hire out ter the big ranchers."

"Unfortunately, they are all gentlemen. And gentlemen do not hire out, as you call it, to work on other people's ranches. They do not even work on their own! Besides the relatives, there is a veritable army of lazy servants—some Indian, some part Spanish—helping to eat every rancher out of house and home."

"Does Mr. Soto get good money fer the hides?" Lank asked.

76 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Yes. Hides and tallow are profitable enough. But there are too many demands on that money. And it is his only source of income. Before the last shipment went off, there was a robbery."

"Who done it?" Tess asked breathlessly.

"They do not know. They suspect some Americans; one man's name is Ben Yellow. He lives in the town. Pio Nahuan, who is the manager of the cattle range, the leader of the *vaqueros*, thinks Ben Yellow was at the bottom of it."

"Ain't there any sheriffs?" Lank wanted to know.

"They seem to be of very little use. Besides, Pio Nahuan has no proof."

"I reckon that's why Munita thought I was comin' ter steal, when she seen me first thing yesterday." Lank grinned. "I'd like ter ask Pio Nahuan about the hides," he added, his face sobering again.

"I reckon he don't speak English," Tess said. She too looked worried. "It's like Lank says, ma'am. These folks ben good ter us, like nobody in the world ever was before. Not only they took us in an' gave us food an' a roof; but they act like we was their kind, fine folks, an' like they's real fond of us."

"The Californian's open heart, open hand, open house. You will find, as you know them better, that two things said of the Californian by an English visitor, who wrote of the life here, are true—'the first gentleman and the finest horseman in the world.' But never a thought for the morrow."

"It's goin' ter be hard fer us ter help stop them bein' ruined," Tess went on, "when none of the help speaks English."

"I'm studyin' about that," Lank said. "What did yer say Pio Nahuan was leader of?"

"The *vaqueros*. The English word, cowherd, hardly gives the right sense. They are the men who drive and kill and skin the cattle. They live on the range about twenty-five miles from here. They speak only Spanish, of course."

"Donyer, in that town near here—"

"El Toro. It is just ten miles north."

"El Toro," Lank repeated it carefully. "An' that other word yer jes' said was *vakairohs*." He pronounced it slowly, looking at her for approval. "Well, what I started ter say was, do yer know if I can git some plain American pants an' a shirt in El Toro? I ain't built ter farm in velvet."

78 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Yes. There are other Americans in the valley. And the shopkeepers have begun to import the things Americans want."

"I'll go an' hunt fer that town, I reckon, some time to-day. Got ter start work to-morrer."

"There! At last, Munita appears with the books. And she is loitering to feed the pigeons on her way! At this rate, I fear you and your sister will have a very short time each day to learn your lessons in English."

"Can yer teach Spanish, Donyer?" he asked.

Doña Jones looked surprised.

"Yes. But you can pick up a good deal just by living among people who speak it."

Lank shook his head.

"I'll agree that Tess an' me hasn't much schoolin' in English, Donyer. An' it's right kind of yer ter want ter learn us ter talk it nice, like yer learned Ernesto an' Munita. But I ain't got the time ter learn English, Donyer. I got ter learn *Spanish*. An' I got ter learn it *quick*. Coz it's my dooty ter try ter stop Mr. Soto from bein' ate up alive, an' bein' robbed. I got ter save his ranch."

Doña Jones's eyes kindled.

"*Buena suerte!*" she said.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Good luck. You may count on all the help I can give. But I doubt, sadly, that you will succeed in starving off the relatives, or in curing the servants of their laziness."

Lank frowned. His gray eyes grew hard.

"Yes, I will. Coz it's no way ter run a farm."

"Lank's terrible set when he makes up his mind," Tess said to Doña Jones. "It's like the way he was back there on the desert. Seemed like we'd never git acrost. An' then we got lost in the hills. I was scared. But Lank knew there was a way out an' he jes' kep' on till he found it. He ain't able ter let go, once he's took a notion. Yer'll see, Doña Jones. Lank's took a notion ter farm this place right. He'll do it."

"Again, *buena suerte*, Don Lank! To-morrow, you will begin to understand your difficulties. For to-morrow all the relatives will be here. It is Don Vicente's own birthday. All the relatives and all the servants will arrive with presents. And a pretty price he will have to pay for them! To-night those who are nearest El Toro will gather at the inn, to drink his health in advance. And the innkeeper will not hesitate to send him an enormous bill for their

80 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

celebration. Cows, chickens, sheep, will be slaughtered to feed some two dozen families, with their children and servants. Not to mention the fodder for their horses. Yes. To-morrow you will have your first experience of a birthday at the Ranch of the Golden Flowers!"

CHAPTER VIII

TESS AND LANK LEARN CALIFORNIAN WAYS

IT appeared, however, that Munita had no time for education this morning. Mamma had decided to go to Monterey on most important affairs connected with the birthday feast. She would require the companionship of both her son and her daughter. Ernesto, in fact, must drive.

In the course of an hour they set out, Don Silencio accompanying the carriage on horseback.

"Well, there's an end of lessons!" Doña Jones said, as she turned back from the driveway after she and Lank and Tess had waved the travelers out of sight. "I don't suppose that you and Tess want to spend the morning in the study of English grammar. Though you need it sadly, my dear young friends—sadly," she repeated the word with emphasis.

Lank looked her in the eyes with his most serious expression.

82 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Reckon that's so, Donyer," he said. "Back in Kansas Tess an' me somehow never could git much time away from the farm ter go ter the school. It was off a piece, about ten miles. An' we could only go 'tween times, when we wasn't plowin' or seedin' or mowin'. Looks like Tess an' me'll have ter git along without first-class learnin'. Now we're here; an' first thing we find out is that the ranch is goin' ter ruin fer needin' jes' what we learned about farmin'—an' about hard work—back in Kansas. An' there ain't no time fer us ter learn Californy grammar neither. We got ter learn *words* that's *farmin'* words. So, if yer'll be so kind, Donyer, as ter teach me how ter say, in Spanish, words like 'plow' an' 'horse' an' 'work' an' 'hurry up,' I'll be thankful, Donyer. I could learn a lot of words if we'd spend all mornin' at it."

Miss Hepsibah Jones Milton laughed. Her eyes gleamed.

"We will do that!" she exclaimed.

"An' I kin learn makin' butter in Spanish!" Tess cried eagerly.

"I guess I'll commence with a horse an' all that goes with it—saddle, bridle, an' all," Lank said. "Coz I'm goin' ter the town right after dinner; an'

Ernesto ain't here ter ride with me, nor see ter the saddlin'. I got ter talk ter the stableman."

They gave joyous concentration to the lesson Lank had outlined as if it were a game.

Once Lank remarked, with a mild reproachfulness, on the unnecessary complications of "el" and "la" and "un" and "una."

"Seems like 'twould be easier at the start, when the first Spanish folks was inventin' their language, if they'd lef' out all this male an' female. Tryin' ter harness a *caballo* in Spanish first time, like I'm doin', it bothers me ter remember that I got ter put a male bit in his mouth, an' a female saddle on his back."

"I reckon things ain't ever goin' ter be too easy fer us," said Tess. "We ain't the kind of folks that tumbles inter easy ways."

"The climate's easy," Lank replied. "An' that eases up everythin' else." He looked gravely at Doña Jones for confirmation as he enunciated the words he had learned, beginning with horse, saddle, girth, bridle, bit, head, foot, tail.

After dinner, Doña Jones went with him to the stable and listened, with humorous pleasure, while he asked the stableman for each article of a riding

84 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

horse's equipment; much to the delight of Tomás, who complimented him with hearty insincerity on his fluency and excellent accent.

"The horse I rode before breakfast is in the little field down back a piece. There's mebbe a half-dozen horses in that field; Ernesto didn't call it a field, but somethin' Spanish." He looked at her questioningly.

"*El corral.*" She supplied the word. "It means a yard, any enclosure for stock, poultry, and so on."

"*Corral.* Yes, that's it. Now, Donyer, I still got ter ask yer ter tell this here Tomás ter come along an' catch my horse. I ain't learned ter say all that yit, nor how ter swing a rope, like Ernesto done it this mornin'. Say, Donyer! It sure was pretty ter see him twirl that leather rope."

"*El lazo.*"

He smiled, with twinkling eyes.

"That's it. Tell Tomás ter come an' *lazo* the spotted horse fer me, please, Donyer."

He listened acutely to what she said to Tomás and then repeated it himself. Tomás was in transports.

"What intelligence has this Señor Don Lank!" he exclaimed to Doña Jones.

"What's the color of my horse in Spanish, Don-
er?" Lank wanted to know. "What's Spanish fer
a spotted horse?"

"El pintojo."

"El pintojo," he repeated carefully.

"The word means 'spotted' or 'mottled.' But the
Californians have made a special noun of it, to give
a name to these horses which are splashed with red
and white. That use of the word probably comes
from Mexico. The Americans in California call
this horse a 'pinto.' Ben Yellow was riding what he
called a 'pinto,' the day he came to the Golden
Flowers."

"The man they think stole the hides? He's been
here?"

"Yes. He came with a story of being in trouble,
poor, and so forth, and Don Vicente gave him hos-
pitality, clothes, food, and put a handful of coins
under his pillow, so that he should have money for
his journey without having to receive it from another
man's hand and feel it a debt. That is the Cali-
fornian's way of helping the stranger."

"Yer mean a Californian don't expect ter be paid
back?" Lank was puzzled.

"Oh, never! Putting money under the stranger's

86 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

pillow is their beautiful sensitive way of expressing generosity. They wish to save the pride of those who are poorer than themselves. If the stranger, not understanding the custom, speaks of the money, the Californian will say: 'Why do you ask me? It is the open hand of God which supplies you. Therefore thank God; and continue your journey in confidence.' How abominable that there are mean creatures who accept Don Vicente's kindness and then rob him! No wonder the Californians despise *gringos*."

Lank's serious face lightened with his slow half-smile.

"That's what Munita called me when I first come here. An' she said it like a cuss word. What's it mean, Donyer?"

"It really does not mean anything. It is not a pure Spanish word. It is a corruption of *griego*, which is the Spanish for 'Greek.' I don't know whether it originated here or in South America. It is a term of contempt."

"It sure is! Munita made me git red in the face when she called me *gringo*. But say, Donyer, 'tain't right fer Don Vicente ter do that way fer every

kind of stranger that comes ter the ranch. There's some mighty bad men that's jes' as fond of travelin' as any minister of the Gospel. Where's this Ben Yellow hang out, Donyer?"

"In El Toro."

"Reckon I'll look him over."

He picked up the reins, nodded to her gravely, and rode off.

"I have some mending to do this afternoon," Doña Jones said to Tess after Lank's departure. "How will you amuse yourself?"

"Why, I'd like ter help yer. I can sew real good."

"That will be charming," Doña Jones spoke a trifle doubtfully. "Doña Emilia's stockings and dresses are all of such fine materials. Can you really darn? I've yet to see the servant here who can. The young ladies are supposed to learn fine sewing, such as embroidery. Munita sometimes enjoys making a rosebud in the corner of a handkerchief, but she hates darning her stockings. Californian gentlewomen supply gracious and lovely things; and Californian gentlemen, large-hearted, generous, and chivalrous things. But for the merely plain, prac-

88 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

tical, useful things, don't go to a Californian of either sex!"

She found that Tess was an expert needlewoman. They sewed and talked in the patio; Tess gratefully accepting correction of her English pronunciation the while.

CHAPTER IX

LANK ENCOUNTERS BEN YELLOW

AS Lank Hardie rode northward toward the town, he pondered deeply on what he had learned about the De Soto family from Doña Jones. He was not emotional; less so than Tess, who had her moments of unreserved rapture or grief. Perhaps he hardly *felt* things until he had turned them over in his mind and discovered what he *thought* about them. In this he was typical of his place and generation: the first generation born on the frontier, always forced to toil and to think beyond its years. There the only way of life was to *know*, to use intelligence all the time, to stop, look, listen; or meet the swift fate of the unwary in a world where the wilderness soil and forest yielded nothing graciously and where the Indian was hostile. To follow fancy or blind instinct, feel and let go, was too perilous a mode of life in that world. Lank thought the harder, and was the more reticent about

90 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

his feelings, because he knew that he was a *slow* thinker.

He was, in his slow calm way, moved by the character of Don Vicente. To hear of a man giving without thought of return and, what was more, doing it with such care not to wound the pride of the recipient, stirred him the more the longer he pondered it without being able to find a flaw.

"A man like him oughter git a lot back," he mused. "'Taint right if he don't. I got ter see that he gits somethin' back off me."

He trotted on. The road lay between small groves of peppers, and eucalyptus trees. The breeze sometimes brought the wholesome, oily pungency of the latter to his throat and nostrils. The low-lying rolling landscape was golden with poppies and mustard. Presently he glimpsed the dark vermilion and brown roofs and the chocolate-hued adobe walls of the town, showing amid the trunks and foliage of more eucalyptus and pepper trees.

He noticed that on the other side of the road, opposite the town, there was a large fenced enclosure. Just outside it, here and there, were tiers of planks and logs, evidently seats. Hobbled horses

limped about, cropping, or lay in the shade of a live oak, in the sloping field behind the town.

The road, passing between the first houses, went directly into a square, the plaza of El Toro. There was a tree-shaded well in the center of the square. Two men, in bright serapes, lay asleep under the tree, their sombreros over their eyes. Another man lay asleep on a bench in front of the inn on the south side of the plaza. The shops, houses and the church which faced the square were all alike silent and apparently deserted.

Lank tied his horse to a tree by the well and made a tour of the plaza, peering in at the small windows, which were generally barred but without panes, and at the doors when these were open. Several were locked. The owners of the locked doors evidently took their siestas at home. The others lay snoring among their merchandise. His preliminary exploration enabled Lank to locate a shop, now locked, which apparently catered to the taste of the small *gringo* populace. He saw overalls of the desired style, shirts, and American boots within. It occurred to him that he might learn at the inn where to find the shopkeeper who was to sell him these things.

92 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Inside the café he discovered the first signs of life awake which he had seen in El Toro. Three men sat at a table talking over plates now empty but still smeared with the memory of frijoles—the inevitable dish of brown beans dashed with garlic. The man who was facing the door was tall and of large build. His face was very red and his hair, bushy eyebrows, and long drooping mustaches were of a barley sugar blondness. He had small round blue eyes and a long nose.

Lank went to the table and asked politely where he could find the shopkeeper who sold American clothes. In speaking, he noticed a tattooed anchor on the cheek of one of the other man and another anchor on the back of his hand. There was a silver hoop in his left ear. He was swarthy and Lank supposed him to be Spanish. The third man was, he thought, like the big blond man, an American. The latter was staring at him.

“I saw yer wasn’t Spanish when yer come in the door,” he said, “an’ I was tryin’ ter figger where yer got them Spanish clothes.”

“I want some plain pants an’ a shirt,” Lank replied affably enough, ignoring the other’s hinted

question. Lank did not give even unimportant information to strangers.

"Wal, my friend here, Mr. Jute," he waved toward the third man, "he'll sell yer what yer've got money ter pay fer." He was still staring hard at Lank. "Come from Frisco?"

"No. I'd like ter buy them clothes, Mr. Jute."

"No hurry. No hurry," the blond man waved to deter Mr. Jute from rising. "No sense in leavin' good food ter waste," he went on, apparently oblivious of the empty bean dish and the smeared plates. "I dunno how yer expect ter git interjooiced all round if yer don't tell me yer name. Got a streak in yer that's a leetle mite balky, ain't yer?" His unwinking eyes bored into Lank again. "'Tain't a good streak ter show round me. I cyan't abide it."

"My name's Hardie," Lank answered. "Didn't suppose it would interest yer, Mr.—"

"Yellow. Ben Yellow. Our other friend here is a Portygee, Cap'n Rosa of the good ship *Ave del Mar*; an' a better sailor never fouled the breeze with a cargo of hides."

The mention of hides added to his discovery of

94 [The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
the blond man's identity gave Lank a thrill of excitement; but he made no sign of it.

"Yer give up the ship ter stay in Californy, I reckon?" he said casually.

No; with many oaths, Captain Rosa cursed all terra firma and said that he could hardly wait till his ship sailed three days hence.

"Mebbe Mr. Jute'd rather I'd go ter some other store an' quit botherin' him?" Lank said.

"Wal, go along with him, Jute. He's the balky kind. *I cyan't abide* them balky boys! Sot himself like a mule agin tellin' a gent what he come ter El Toro fer."

"I reckon yer didn't hear me, Mr. Yellow; fer I sure told yer," Lank answered gravely. "I come ter git some clothes."

Ben Yellow's lips opened in a grin without mirth, showing long stained teeth.

CHAPTER X

THE LAND JUMPERS ATTACK LANK

MR. JUTE was a drab man colored in pale browns. His voice was low and his tone and manner were confidential even when he stated the price of a shirt. He did not appear to note that Lank's leather pouch held seventy-five dollars, the sum with which the elder Jefferson Hardie had left Kansas to buy new ground in California.

"Mr. Yellow is a vurry remark'ble gen'leman," he murmured. "He has a great future in this country. When I think what I was back East, a country school teacher layin' the stick about farmers' sons and gettin' never so much as a present of eggs! And what I've come into sence Mr. Yellow took me on, seein' I was a man to trust! What an insight the man has! But it don't do for nobody to balk him." He shook his head seriously. "I consider it the acme of misfortune (speakin' like the scholar I used to be) for a young man just come to Cali-

96 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
fornyer to make a balky impression on Mr. Yellow." He waited for a response.

"I'll take this one," Lank said, at last. He picked out a stout-fibered shirt and then counted out the price methodically, dollar after dollar. He thought he was being cheated but realized that there was no help for it. He must have the outfit. "These pants is too short. Show me some that's longer." He drew the string of his wallet tight again. "I want pants I can turn up, so's when they wear holes in the crease round the ankles I can cut off the turned-up piece an' snip off what's worn out an' sew it on again an' the pants is still long enough."

Mr. Jute sighed, and produced the larger pair.

"Well," he said, "I don't doubt you're a young man who tends to his own business."

"Try ter," Lank replied laconically.

He was thinking hard in his slow, laborious way. He ought to learn something about this group of men, but he must be very careful how he worded his questions.

"Before the year is out there'll be great changes in Californyer," Mr. Jute said, looking at Lank obliquely. "And that is when Mr. Yellow will really come into his own, as the sayin' goes."

"I reckon he's one of the big ranchers," Lank said.

"He will be!" Mr. Jute answered eagerly. "He has his eye on a ranch now. Spent some time there recently, lookin' the place over. Not that the sleepy Spanish that own it guessed what was on his mind. Take my advice, Mr. Hardie, and find the occasion to make up to Mr. Yellow. It will stand you in good stead hereafter."

There was something confidential even in the way he wrapped up Lank's purchases in heavy paper and knotted the twine. It was as if he tied up a secret.

"All us Americans should hang together, Mr. Hardie, or we might each and all hang separately—you know the sayin'? We are but a handful of superior men here in the enemy's country. And the hand of every Spaniard is against us. The Spanish have the soil and the cattle and horses and all the big trade. They don't give an American a chance."

"They let yer run a store here," Lank said.

"Oh, a small affair! Trifles a man can make no money at! That's Californyer hospitality for you! But Mr. Yellow has seen through them. The Span-

98 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

iard who put gold under Mr. Yellow's pillow will suffer for it, I can tell you! There's a way of usin' deeds to property and a way of losin' them, you understand. And luckily it takes little money to buy a Mexican government clerk. Corrupt, every one of them."

"Yer mean, Mr. Yellow could git ahold of the papers some place where they was filed?"

"Ah, well. It's the most amusin' thing—that Spaniard puttin' gold pieces under Mr. Yellow's pillow. He dines with the governor in Monterey, all of them in velvet and gold lace. But he never thinks of the clerk in the land office, who can overthrow him. My advice to you, Mr. Hardie, is to make up to Mr. Yellow. I happen to know he can use another man."

The doorway was darkened by the short thickset bulk of Captain Rosa. He addressed Mr. Jute in bad Spanish.

"Yellow has gone to hide in the house of his friend, Alvarez. He has seen the fur trader, Bridger, and some others with him ride into the plaza. He wants to know what you have found out about this boy. Who are his friends that he wears such good velvet like a rich rancher?"

"The boy is very stupid or very crafty," Jute replied. "I have found out nothing except that he has still more than sixty dollars after buying his clothes. He had seventy-five dollars."

"Sixty dollars. And he rides a good horse, the pinto out there. Have him followed. We should have both his money and his horse. The horse could easily be sold to Bridger to-night because one of his horses is lame. The boy's clothes also will bring money."

"Ben is quick as a flash to order a man put out of the way. Does it on sight. Seems to smell the kind a man is at the first whiff."

"He says he hopes you haven't talked unwisely. You run on too much when you've had wine." Rosa went out.

Lank could not follow the conversation but he caught several words, which he had learned from Doña Jones that very morning, by painstaking repetition: such as seventy-five dollars, rides, good, horse, pinto, clothes. He thought it likely that these men had evil intentions toward the things of his which they had mentioned. While he heard the word "Bridger" he did not recognize it as the name of his mountain acquaintance.

100 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Two customers came in and prevented Jute from following Lank when the boy left the shop. Jute was not worried because he knew that Rosa was on the watch, too, and would know when the pinto was ridden out of the plaza.

Lank saw Jim Bridger emerging from a group of horsemen and ran to catch him before he could reach a large house toward which he was striding. The famous trapper and guide gave a jovial shout, grabbed Lank by the shoulders and shook him in the typical "bear hug."

"Wal! I sure am glad ter see yer, boy! Ain't yer the grandee, too? Whar did yer git them velvet pants?"

Lank grinned, flushing crimson.

"I heard tell down ter Monterey as how a Kansas boy had stole a pair o' the Gov'nor's pants. But I'd have sworn Lank Hardie warn't dude enough ter do it. When I go back termorrer or day after I'll tell the Gov'nor whar his pants is, so he kin send that thar gold-lace army o' hisn ter git 'em off yer."

"Are yer goin' back? Say, Mr. Bridger, I got ter tell yer some things. Do yer know a man named Ben Yellow?"

Bridger frowned.

"Dunno any good o' him. Nor his friend Mr. Jute, neither. What's the yarn, boy? Shoot!"

Lank told him all that had happened to him since his arrival at the Hacienda de las Flores de Oro.

"Mr. Soto's done a lot fer me an' Tess, Mr. Bridger. An' seems like I got ter stop this rascal from stealin' his hides an' mebbe sneakin' his ranch away from him."

"Yeh. I reckon Ben Yellow's got friends in the gov'ment: some rascals he's bribed. Looks ter me like he was let inter the warehouse here or at Monterey an' stole the hides an' put 'em aboard this Rosa's ship some place, likely in another bay—El Cajón mebbe. I dunno jes' what he could do ter git the ranch. Only he'd make a good start if he could git the original deed, destroy it, or jes' change it mebbe. Laws is all kinder careless in Californy. It's supposed ter be Mexican law, here. But they're such a long way from Mexico that the officials, an' everybody else, mostly does as they darn please. All my trade in Monterey is agin the law. Mexico don't want no furreners tradin' round here. Monterey is the capital city o' the Kingdom o' Happy Smugglers. There's no tellin' but, what with a stolen

102 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
deed an' bribed officers, Ben Yellow might git that ranch."

"What ought I ter do?"

"Yer best talk ter Kit Carson about it when he comes down. He'll be along next month with Captain Frémont. They're goin' ter Monterey. I'll see what I kin do through some friends o' mine when I go back. I'm pretty sure Ben Yellow an' his herd is the ones that robbed our fur cache last year. Do yer pack a gun?"

"I got a rifle but I didn't fetch it along to-day."

"'Tain't safe goin' unarmed. A big crowd o' Mexicans has jes' come in. See 'em makin' fer the inn."

Lank looked over the group in the plaza.

"One of 'em seems ter be interested in my horse," he said.

A dark man with a scarred face and thick black hair in two pigtails tied together at the ends with black ribbon, was rubbing his hand over the pinto. Apparently he summoned others; for two men turned back on their way to the inn and inspected the horse and all his equipment minutely.

"I can't have anybody stealin' Mr. Soto's horse while I got it out." Lank's brow contracted.

"Better slip away fer home when they is all safe inside," Bridger advised. "Californians never walk a step; an' they is so plumb fond o' horse-flesh they can't pass a good horse on the road without takin' it home."

"Looks like I got more ter tend ter in Californy than I had in Kansas." Lank smiled ruefully. "But I got ter help Mr. Soto out. The family's ben so good ter Tess an' me."

Bridger nodded.

"Tell Kit Carson all about it. I feel like some-thin' big is goin' ter break when Frémont comes south. Thar's rumors goin' round. The way this Soto has treated two stranded *gringos* would hit Frémont an' Kit atween the eyes, I'll bet; like it hit me. Soto could do with friends like them two men."

Lank nodded.

Just then the man with the pigtails and the scarred face came by. He passed close to Bridger and Lank purposely, so that he could take a good look at them. His hostile glance lingered over Lank's clothes.

"Yer'll have ter wait awhile. Let 'em hit it up inside till they forgit yer," Bridger said. "Them dark boys has come ter celebrate an' bimeby they'll

104 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
be settin' round a keg o' wine gamblin' their shirts
away; an' nothin' short o' revolution could pry 'em
loose. If yer wait till dusk yer'll stand a good
chance o' givin' 'em the slip. I'll see what I kin do
fer yer in Monterey."

When Lank drew water for the *pintojo* at dusk
the plaza was almost deserted. Songs and the
sound of guitars came out of the inn with the flare
of its lamps and the odors of frijoles, ensaladas,
tamales, and the mild cheap native vino tinto.

His departure was watched from within the store
by Mr. Jute, the half-breed named Alvarez, and
Ben Yellow, who had ventured forth again after
Bridger and his friends had left the square.

"Rosa was ter have brung his man in afore this,
ter foller that balky boy fer me," Yellow said. "We
can't wait an' let this balky boy go scot-free with a
horse I've sot my heart on. Jute, yer'll have ter
foller him, an' Alvarez'll go along ter see the horse
don't run away whilst one of yer is puttin' the balky
boy ter sleep. Sixty dollars, them clothes, an' a
purty pinto is worth yer takin' a *leetle* jaunt fer."

Presently Alvarez led up the two horses. The
sound of their hoofs passing the inn brought the
scarred-faced man with the pigtails to the door. He

peered across the dusky square for the horse which had so interested him and did not see it. He threw his glass on the floor and shouted excitedly to his companions. They were crowding out of the narrow door into the plaza and making for their horses about the time when Mr. Jute and Alvarez sighted Lank at the turn of the road ahead of them.

"We will join him a little farther on. Have you your knife, señor?" Jute said to Alvarez.

Lank heard horses coming at an increasing pace. He looked back. The sky was darkening swiftly and he could not see the riders clearly enough to recognize one of them.

"Now," said Jute. They spurred forward at a racing gallop and caught up with Lank, getting him between them. Jute swung round just ahead of him and took hold of the pinto's bridle.

"Why, Mr. Hardie! If I'd known it was you I'd have halloed to you, to induce you to wait for us. Did you meet Señor Alvarez, one of the leadin' citizens of El Toro?"

Lank did not answer. The pinto reared, resentful of the new hand on its bridle, and Lank kept his seat with difficulty. Alvarez, who was slipping his knife out from under his serape, was swept out of

106 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

range as his horse jumped aside after a vicious kick from the pinto. The *pintojo* next rushed at Jute's horse with open mouth. Lank, no rider, clung to the pommel. Jute was trying to draw his pistol. He, too, was not an expert horseman and was chiefly concerned with keeping his seat.

Down upon this scene the scarred-faced man led his comrades at a tearing, pounding gallop. Lank could make nothing of the excited Spanish dialogue that followed. He saw the newcomers seize Jute and Alvarez, search and disarm them; while two men held his own horse by the bridle. In obedience to Scar-face's orders ropes were produced. The hands of Jute and Alvarez were tied behind their backs; they were made fast by their waists to the pommels of their saddles. Then their mounts were turned toward town and lashed into a frenzy of speed by the quirts of a dozen men.

Scar-face turned on Lank now with a fury of denunciation. A *vaquero* searched him for weapons, took his wallet and his parcel and handed them to the leader, who put the wallet inside his shirt and hung the package on his saddlehorn. Lank thought that, if these men knew whose was the pinto horse, they might hesitate to steal it.

"*El cabal-yo*," he stammered, "he is *De Soto cabal-yo*," putting the accent on the last syllable.

"*Si!*" the man replied, and launched a tirade.

They tied him in the same fashion. Scar-face took his bridle, and, in this humiliating position, he was led off at an easy gallop.

He wondered where he was going and what these bandits would do to him. Since he was helpless, there was no sense in worrying.

When he caught the first glimpse of the hacienda, white under the silver disk of the moon, a lump rose in his throat. If only he could cry out loudly enough to be heard before his captors swept him past along the highway! To his amazement Scar-face, accelerating the pace, dashed down upon the ranch house with shouts. The whole family and most of the servants had rushed out, some holding the candles from the living-room table, by the time that the cavalcade came to a dramatic halt.

Scar-face, bowing profusely, hat in hand, before Don Vicente, was telling his tale when Munita shrieked:

"It is Don Lank!"

Ernesto rushed forward to make sure. His father and uncle followed. Mamma's voice was heard call-

108 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

ing upon saints and angels. Lank found himself free of his bonds. He slid gratefully to the ground. Scar-face was in the act of passing the package and wallet to Don Vicente.

"See now, Don Lank, how embarrassing it is sometimes to possess loyal servants!" Don Vicente's voice shook with mirth in spite of himself. "In El Toro, where my *vaqueros* had gone to drink my health, because of my birthday to-morrow, your horse was at once recognized. My faithful Pio Nahuan knows not alone the name, but also the family secrets of all my horses. He mistook you for a horse thief. Now you understand all that followed!"

Lank's slow grin was the signal for shouts of laughter.

"Say! Pio Nahuan's the man I've been wantin' ter meet. An' the way I met him shows me what kind of a man he is. Don Vicente, will yer please tell him that fer me?"

Don Vicente translated. The foreman's black eyes sparkled. He and Lank gripped hands. Don Vicente sent the *vaqueros* off to the kitchen to be fed by Maruja and her aides.

"Pio Nahuan tells me that all the *vaqueros* con-

The Land Jumpers Attack Lank 109

tributed toward a fine blade with a silver handle, which was purchased in Monterey for my birthday," he said, as Pepa was setting food before Lank. "What good fellows they are, my *vaqueros*! But like children! To-day at the inn, while they were celebrating, they lost the knife in gambling with the innkeeper. Early to-morrow morning I must send some one to El Toro to pay their score and to redeem the knife." He chuckled.

Lank also laughed at this. It was funny, he admitted to himself, like everything else that had happened. But it was one of the pleasant Californian customs which had to be stopped, at this hacienda!

"Where will they all sleep?" Tess asked.

Don Vicente shrugged.

"On the ground somewhere, in the yards, or the fields, with their mounts. The earth is a *vaquero's* bed and his horse is his pillow."

CHAPTER XI

TESS RIDES AFTER CATTLE

IN Monterey Mamma had not confined herself to buying accessories for Don Vicente's feast. A fresh consignment of fine muslins and laces had tempted her to bedeck her "new daughter." When these yards of splendor were unrolled before Tess's eyes in the morning she was stirred to tears. After all that Doña Jones had said of the ruin threatening this extravagant and generous family, she felt as conscience-stricken as if she had been responsible for the purchase herself. But even her genuine feeling of regret could not prevent her from a sensation of rapture as her roughened finger tips slid timidly over the delicate fabrics.

"She will be very beautiful in these stuffs," Mamma, nodding and sparkling at Tess, said to Munita. "I hope you will not be jealous because I

do what I can to make her prettier and also show her affection. She is among strangers with nothing in the world of her own. The poor little one!"

Munita shrugged daintily, raised her eyebrows, made a little moue.

"To the Spanish it is as natural to be jealous as to breathe," she answered. "I make no promise never to be jealous; because, with persons of breeding, the word of honor must be kept. But my nature is not base, as you know, and therefore I shall do nothing mean to her when I am jealous. God takes care of these things, when one is not base, so that no harm is done."

With a gesture and an upward look of her velvet eyes, she confided to Heaven the racial problem which was beyond her powers to solve. She turned a radiant smile on Tess.

"Soon we will have the women who sew, to come here. And Doña Jones also will help. In everything important Doña Jones always helps."

"Her eyes, so blue! Only in the sky one picks such flowers," said Mamma, delighted and moved by the glow of gratitude in Tess's eyes.

"I wish I could say *jes* 'Thank yer' in Spanish," Tess said.

112 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"Then repeat after me, '*Gracias, Mamma.*' She will be pleased."

Tess's attempt was rewarded with another of Mamma's brightest smiles.

"We have to wear rough clothes this morning," Munita explained eagerly, as she and Tess hastened across the patio from Mamma's room to their own. "Because we will ride with Ernesto and our *vaqueros* to see the steers hunted for the meals to-day. Mamma does not like me to go because she fears always that I may be injured. But"—she made another gesture tossing away responsibility—"in some matters I find it necessary to please myself. I am what is named by Doña Jones a tomboy."

Tess laughed.

"I reckon I can stick on a horse, but I can't ride like yer does it. Time I learned, I guess."

"*¡Sí!* The horse will be gentle. Our horses have no evil tricks. Ernesto will be glad to see you learning to ride. Certainly, if Ernesto forbade me to be a tomboy I would never dare to ride with the *vaquero*; because always I do only what Ernesto wishes. To anger Ernesto would stab my heart. But he approves."

Lank and Ernesto were waiting for them with the horses already saddled. The *vaqueros* led by Pio Nahuan raced ahead. The four young people followed.

"We cannot ride with the herd to-day because we have our friends to take care of," Ernesto said in Spanish to his sister.

They drew rein on the slope of a hill and watched the wild riding and graceful lariat play of the *vaqueros* on the level below them. Pio Nahuan ahead, the others close after him, all yelling like savages, they dashed upon the herd of black cattle. Tess gasped as she saw the herd stampede in terror, with the cowboys cutting in among them.

"These are young cattle and very wild," Ernesto said.

Sometimes a steer turned and, bellowing, rushed at the horseman who was harassing him. The *vaquero* swung his horse aside barely in time, it seemed, to escape the beast's horns; while the lasso fell unerringly. One steer broke from the herd and made such a sudden dash up the slope that it was almost upon the four young people before they saw it. Their whole attention at the time was concentrated on Pio Nahuan, who was making a brilliant

114 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

and needlessly perilous display of his talents for their benefit. Tess shrieked as she saw the maddened animal charging straight for her horse. Ernesto saw it perhaps a fraction of a moment sooner. He had his lasso in his hand, the end tied to the pommel of his saddle, ready for such an emergency. Tess cried out again as Ernesto raced by, between her horse and the charging steer, the *reata* uncoiling and leaping from his hand. The next moment, the steer was on its side in a cloud of dust almost under her horse's nose, being dragged helplessly at the lariat's end. A *vaquero* had seen the danger too late to avert it, but he arrived now at full gallop, flung himself off and, with his knife, made an end of the steer.

"It is too bad the cow came to alarm you," Ernesto said, reining in beside Tess. His green eyes gleamed as she explained how she had feared that the beast would kill him. But he replied nonchalantly that such affairs were never so dangerous as they appeared. "If one is in practice, all goes well." He turned to Munita and said mockingly in Spanish, "Little sister, why do you make such a face?"

Munita, her cheeks white from fear and her eyes burning with admiration, disdained to answer him.

They galloped back to the house, where the girls set about attiring themselves to receive visitors.

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRTHDAY FEAST AT GOLDEN FLOWERS

MORE *vaqueros* arrived during the morning with the carcasses of beeves killed on the other ranges. The sheepmen came in with mutton. Other employees were busy uncovering and scraping and preparing the pits for barbecuing the meat. Silver and gold plate, crystal goblets and innumerable dishes of fine porcelain were being washed and polished in two huge tubs beside the well by women servants. The fires in the kitchen of the mansion and in the servants' quarters flamed incessantly for the boiling of beans and rice, and the biting sauce of peppers and tomatoes which would be used for *chile con carne*. Kegs of olives were opened, immense heaping trays of oranges pared, sacks of nuts emptied to be cracked on the grinding stone. All the labor for the feast went forward swiftly to the accompaniment of laughter, shouts, songs, gay chatter, and the passionate scolding of Maruja.

The immense drawing room had been dusted and made ready for the occasion. Roses in great bowls, sheaves of wild mustard, palms, golden poppies, lent radiance to the cool somberness of the chamber which was furnished in heavy antique carved woods and old damasks and tapestries. Dark-toned portraits of bygone De Sotos, heavy swords they had wielded, a mirror in a solid silver frame, were among the wall decorations. The family waited here in state to receive the guests. The men wore their best black velvets. Mamma looked superbly lovely in gold satin with black lace flounces and a priceless old lace mantilla. Munita and Tess were in white with gay ruffles and white mantillas. Doña Jones appeared somewhat less austere than usual in gray silk with black lace ruffles.

Lank was enough of a boy to look forward eagerly to the party, but he could not help worrying about the cost of it. Still, the sight of all the male and female employees of the ranch working with such energy, fidelity, and vim heartened him. They could work! Let him but get them organized and, with the climate to aid, the products of the ranch would be sufficient to care for all these people yearly and give Don Vicente a surplus. When he said

118 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

something of the sort to Doña Jones she favored him with her dry little smile.

"For a pleasure they will work themselves to the bone," she said. "Try to get them to do it for a profit! *Buena suerte!*"

"Sure, I'll try," Lank said. "An' I'll stick to it till I succeed."

"There come the aunts, María and Eugenia Ramirez, sisters of Don Vicente's stepmother, who is dead," she said as a carriage drew up. "They are spinsters and very poor. Their nephews, also Ramirez, are driving them. They always arrive first. They are very proud, very garrulous and inquisitive and demand a great deal of respect."

Don Vicente had barely kissed their hands and led them indoors, the nephews following with a package, when two more carriages, packed close with women and young girls, arrived with a mounted escort. For an hour the clatter of hoofs to the door was almost incessant. The packages were carried into the dining room and piled on a table against the wall behind Don Vicente's chair. Lázaro, Platón, and Pablo from Maruja's department brought trays of refreshment as each new group arrived. The room was a babel of saluta-

Birthday Feast at Golden Flowers 119

tions, birthday greetings, gossip, wit, and laughter. Don Vicente's laugh rang out frequently. He was as happy as a child.

Ernesto, with some of his "cousins," signaled Lank.

"Come and visit the barbecue," he said. "My father cannot leave his guests; but it is always our custom for one of us to go and look at the roasting. Pio Nahuan is wonderful at this business, too."

They went down to the field, where smoke and rich odors hung over a dozen pits. The *vaqueros* took turns in tending the meat. While some worked, others lay on the ground; or squatted, thrumming guitars.

"Don Vicente must remain with our guests, Pio," Ernesto said in Spanish, his manner formal and dignified. "He sends his good will to you and all his *vaqueros*. In his name I will receive from you the beeves which you have cooked for our table."

Pio Nahuan bowed low, wished long life and good appetite to his master and his family and his guests, and above all to Don Ernesto. Then, springing into action, he rushed for the nearest pit. He shouted orders which brought a dozen aids leaping from the ground. The brown savory meat, cut in

quarters, was hoisted and laid in wooden troughs. The *vaqueros*, led by Pio, bore the troughs to the large dining room, where the guests now sat at the long table. Don Vicente met them at the door. He cut a fragment of the juicy meat from the largest joint, with the knife which he had redeemed from the innkeeper, ate it, praised the beef and the blade, and then signed to the house servants to begin the carving and serving.

"Eat for yourselves and for me also, boys!" he cried to the departing *vaqueros*. "There is no friendship in a lean stomach."

Maruja, furiously jealous of the *vaqueros'* roasts, was demanding better positions on the table for her dishes of beans and rice. In loud asides she advised Their Worships to put their trust in the *chile con carne*, made by an expert, the "dish of a perfection," rather than in "cows roasted by killers."

"*Chile con carne* of such a perfection, Your Worships, that the tongue can taste it, but cannot describe it! Such is this sauce that the tongue can but drown in ecstasy. But *vaqueros'* meat? There will be a toughness! Let the aged particularly have a care; old teeth are brittle. Where did *vaqueros*

learn to cook for gentry! Hah! Is the cow a humming bird? I have observed it all my life and now I say it—that fleas on a bell rope ring no chimes!”

After her wares had been generously praised, Maruja waddled out with great dignity.

Munita was kept busy translating for Tess. Every one had kind words for the young Americans because Mamma had narrated their sad story with many fanciful details of her own imagining.

The beef gave way to lamb and chickens; and these, to salads and sweets. At the close of the meal, Don Vicente opened his packages. No child on Christmas morning could have been more naïvely happy than he. The fact that many of them had been charged to his account at shops in Monterey did not in the least modify his pleasure. These good friends, kinsmen all, had experienced the desire to make him gifts, to show affection and give him happiness. What matter who paid the cost of the objects? It was the beautiful desire alone which was important.

After dinner every one slept. The guest rooms had been prepared for the siesta and hammocks hung in the corridor. Chocolate was served when they

woke. For an hour afterwards the young people rode. Supper was a repetition of dinner, except that the meats were served in cold slices with quantities of jellies and condiments. As the moon rose, the carriages and saddle horses were brought round.

"Adiós! Hasta la vista! Buenas noches, amigos!"

"How have you enjoyed our father's birthday, Don Lank?" Munita inquired as she, Lank, Tess, and Doña Jones lingered in the garden. Ernesto had ridden off beside the carriage of his great-aunts, to pay them the deference of escorting them a mile or two on their way.

"I liked it," was his sincere, unemotional answer.

"It's been wonderful!" Tess breathed.

"I hope Ernesto comes back quick," said Lank. "I need him ter help me talk ter Pio Nahuan about the best way ter stop Ben Yellow from stealin' the hides. This ranch can't afford ter lose them hides."

"Oh, how happy we are to have so many cousins!" Munita exclaimed. She jumped up, pulling Tess with her, and stepped down into the rose garden. "See," she said, "the colors of the petals are different, but so beautiful, in the moonlight!"

"Donyer," said Lank, "we had cousins ter visit

Birthday Feast at Golden Flowers 123

us last year in Kansas. They helped start us on our way ter Californy. But we didn't call 'em cousins."

She saw his slow smile.

"Well?" she queried.

"We called 'em seven-year locusts. Didn't leave a blade of grass nor a leaf on a tree. There's Ernesto." He rose and went to meet him.

CHAPTER XIII

LANK AND ERNESTO MAKE THEIR PLANS

IN the morning the elder members of the family drove to Monterey to dine with the Governor. Don Silencio promised to go to the warehouse and see if all the bales of hides were intact. Don Vicente said that he considered Mr. Jute's innuendoes about the deed to the De Soto property to be merely the insolence of an ignorant foreigner; but, he added to appease Lank, he would discuss the matter with the Governor.

The *vaqueros* occupied themselves until dinner in scraping and cleaning the hides of the cattle and sheep which had been killed for the feast. They were to have the cowhides for new lassos, *cuerdas* ("quirts") and for *chaparajos* (the cowboy's "chaps"). Lank forsook Doña Jones's instructions for Pio Nahuan's, which he received with Ernesto's help. He could not hope to proceed far with the needed reforms until he could make himself under-

stood in Spanish. He learned the nouns which were most frequently used on the cattle range.

"I do not believe it will accomplish"—Ernesto smiled and gesticulated—"to translate these thoughts about milking the cows. *Vaqueros* never have done so. It is even possible they would be insulted."

Lank pondered.

"I don't want ter insult 'em," he said. "But Tess is set on makin' butter an' cheese. She's brought her churn an' it's goin' ter break her heart not ter use it."

Ernesto looked surprised. "She wishes to do this uncomfortable thing? It gives her pleasure?" He sat silent, thinking. "Certainly, Tess must have what she wishes. I must find the way. Wait until I can make a plan so that, when I tell Pio, he will find it amusing. One can do anything with these wild children when they find it amusing."

Lank chuckled.

"I see there ain't only one way of runnin' a farm," he said. "But Ernesto, me an' yer'll have ter teach each other hard every day if we're goin' ter make this ranch pay. An' it's *got* ter pay. Eatin' imported butter is jes' eatin' money. We're goin' ter make all

126 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

the butter we eat. An' we're goin' ter sell butter ter folks in Monterey; have ter buy some more churns an' fix up a dairy. An' all these Indian girls that sets around most of the day will have ter git busy. Tess'll oversee 'em. We'll choose out some good young cows an' we'll set 'em aside fer milch cows. 'Tain't difficult; jes' takes time an' patience."

"My father does not think of these things," Ernesto said. "It has never been our custom. But I am able to see the wisdom of it, because Doña Jones has talked so much to me of the waste at this ranch. Mamma, like my father, thinks not at all of the cost of things. The Spanish consider all this to be mean and even vulgar. I would surely think so too, but for Doña Jones. She is also of high caste, very distinguished, and yet she believes that it is the duty, even of an aristocrat, to conserve his fortune. She says that waste is not honorable. I have wished to do something"—he shrugged—"but I have not known what to do. My father would permit all that I desired. But I have not known." He gestured his helplessness.

"Well, Ernesto, I know. We got ter make a team. I'll tell yer what's ter be done an yer'll tell the *vaqueros* ter do it. Mebbe Munita can help

Tess in learnin' the women ter make butter. They all act like they was crazy about her."

"Sí." Ernesto smiled. "And Munita will enlist the aid of Maruja. They are afraid of Maruja. It is not alone her scolding tongue. She has brought up and taught their duties to all these young women and girls, who were born on our ranch and were brought by their parents to the house to be trained to serve us. They are daughters of old *vaqueros* and herders. And Maruja believes much in the *cuerda* for the young. They will prefer the churn! I know now what I shall do to conquer our *vaqueros*." He gestured energetically, concluding with a snap of his hard brown fingers.

"What's that?" Lank's own hands usually hung limply between his knees while he talked.

"When we desire to select these milch cows, I will go on the range for a week or two weeks, and I will live with the *vaqueros*. I will be to them, not Don Ernesto, but only a *vaquero*. It is the custom, now and then, of an *haciendado* to visit his *vaqueros* and eat at the camp fire and sleep one night in the open with them. They are very proud and independent men and they appreciate when the master comes only as a friend to share their life for a few hours.

128 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

They address him, not by title, but only *amigo* which is friend. It will please them much for me to live with them, *lazo* and brand the cattle, and ride madly as they do. I will ride one of their horses. A cattle pony is *muy bronco*!" He laughed.

"What's that mean?"

"Oh, very bad, rough, wild."

Lank looked concerned.

"T'won't help out much fer yer ter git yer neck broke."

Ernesto snapped his fingers again. His teeth and eyes flashed.

"The horse will never be born that can break my neck! I love nothing so much as to mount one of these wild creatures which will try every trick to throw me. To teach him that he has a master on his back! That is life! The *vaqueros* will be more pleased, even, than if my father should go. Our Spanish servants always love much the young people, especially the son. Our parents are strict, but it does no good because the servants spoil us from our cradles. Now Munita and I will take advantage of that love to induce them to do new work, so that the ranch pays!"

Lank grinned.

"There's another thing I got ter git after right soon: plowin'. The men down in the bean field is jes' scrapin' the soil with a long pointed stick."

"There is no other way. Oh, sometimes, if the soil is hard, they use a piece of iron, or a knife, fastened to the stick. With what do you plow in Kansas?"

Lank asked him if he had not noticed the plow which was now in a shed with the churn and other effects. Ernesto was very much interested to learn what it was used for.

"We can only plot to-day," he said. "We have made the team." His eyes glistened with eagerness. "But the team cannot farm until to-morrow. Because when the *vaqueros* come, we always go to hunt antelope up the valley toward El Cajón. Munita goes also. There is no danger in hunting antelope. Can Tess shoot?"

"Yes. We both shoot. But neither of us'll ever ride like real Californians. We jes' ride ordinary style."

Ernesto laughed.

"We hunt this afternoon."

CHAPTER XIV

TESS AND MUNITA HUNT ANTELOPE

MUNITA and Tess were delighted when the boys bade them hurry into rough riding clothes for the hunt. Both Ernesto and Lank were dressed like *vaqueros*.

"There is much chaparral and mesquite in places. So we have skirts like the *chaparajos* of the *vaqueros*," Munita explained. "They are made of the cow's skins, and we wear them with the hair on the outside."

"Back home there's still plenty deer skin worn, though deer is gittin' scarcer. But they don't wear it with the hair on. Do only *vaqueros* wear it like this?"

"Only *vaqueros*; and they use it only to protect the legs from the thorns, which are very stiff and can tear plain leather. I love my black cowskin skirt, although Mamma mocks me and calls me 'the little *vaquera*'. I think, because you are blond, you

look very nice in this fur. Kings wear the hides of other animals, therefore why should we despise the fur of cows?" She giggled.

"I like it," said Tess. "I'm so glad we're goin' huntin'. I love ter hunt. Lank does, too."

Munita passed her a black cotton skirt and a white neckerchief.

"We will wear the leather sombreros. *Vaqueros* make all these things, and also their saddles, which are very heavy, with the high strong horn covered with plaited thongs, so that the cow cannot break it when the *vaquero* winds the end of the lasso round the saddlehorn."

"I never saw men ride after cows like it's done in Californy." Doña Jones had persuaded Tess already that "seen" was not the past tense of the verb.

Munita shrugged.

"All these things which have to do with cattle came from Mexico. The cattle came also from there. Sometimes Mexican herds come up into our valley; and then there is fighting between our Californian *vaqueros* and the Mexican *vaqueros*, who come to try to drive back the cattle. Because Californian *vaqueros* think that the cows now belong to them,

132 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
since the foolish Mexicans have allowed them to escape."

"Real fightin', with guns?" Tess asked.

Munita seemed to dismiss guns with a casually disdainful gesture.

"Californians do not use the gun very much for fighting. *Vaqueros* fight with lassos and whips. They are skillful in this fighting. My father says that here Spanish people are gentler than elsewhere. Long ago, at first, the bull fight was in California as in Mexico and Spain—*verree* fierce and cruel. But no more. Californians made it only a grand sport, so skillful! No torn wounded horses, no tortured bull. Only the wonderful horsemanship of the *caballeros*."

The four of them, accompanied by Pio Nahuan and a dozen *vaqueros*, rode northward through the valley fields of flowering mustard. Sometimes a mocking bird, in gray unpretentious garb, winged across their path into a grove of eucalyptus, or live oak, and challenged their attention with a silver flood of song. The foothills were a riot of spring green and gold dashed with blues and amethyst and white. The air was light, fresh, and pungently sweet.

They veered into the hills. After another hour's riding they caught sight of antelope. A few scattered animals were cropping lazily along behind the main herd, which had passed over a hill into the next depression.

"Do not shoot these," Ernesto said to Pio. "The shots will startle the others. As you know, antelope are more shy and fearful than all other animals. Our friends have perhaps never seen a herd of these pretty creatures feeding. Let us wait until we cross the hill."

"As you please, Don Ernesto. So long as I have a fat and juicy little beast to cook for my supper among the mesquite to-night, I do not care if it be one of these or another."

Ernesto laughed.

"You shall cook juicy steaks for all of us. And the best pieces must go to Doña Tess."

They made the brow of the hill.

"Oh, Lank! look! look!" Tess exclaimed softly. Her dark blue eyes shone.

The narrow green valley below, shaped something like a shallow boat, was thickly dotted with the graceful little antelope. The curving colorful line of the low hill, which bounded the valley westward,

134 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

was drawn upon a sapphire-blue background that sparkled as only this southwestern sea can. The sun was almost on the horizon and the sapphire sweep of sky and sea was like the fanlike floating of two jeweled feathers set in a golden stick.

"We like to hunt antelope more because we must ride so fast," Ernesto said to Tess. "They are so quick a horse cannot catch them."

He gave the sign and, with rifles ready, the party dashed down.

Shots cracked in unison. The *vaqueros* were trained in this sort of hunting. Ernesto's ball found its mark. So did Lank's. Tess and Munita missed. The herd was leaping forward now as if it ran upon wind. With fierce shouts the *vaqueros* gave chase. Tess's horse went with them, and Munita's sped close in her wake. When Munita shrilled the *vaquero's* cry, Tess made a wild attempt to imitate it. She heard a laugh close at her shoulder and turned to see Ernesto's green eyes sparkling, his teeth flashing. Lank let out the cry of his own border, the Indian war whoop. They dashed on.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT IN THE MOONLIGHT AT EL CAJÓN

AT sunset they turned back. It did not take the deft *vaqueros* long to skin the animals chosen for the camp supper. They would bind the others on their saddles when they set out for the hacienda.

"Are you tired?" Ernesto asked Tess, solicitously.

"No." She beamed at him. Her cheeks were rosy and her eyes bright with exhilaration.

"She rode well, the pretty little one," he said in Spanish to Munita. "We will easily make her a true Californian."

"Yes. And I love her very much. She has such a good disposition. But when you praise her, I become jealous. Can you not praise me also?" she replied.

"Not at all!" he cried mischievously. "What a foolish brother to praise his sister! He would lose all his authority. Pio will compliment you, no doubt."

136 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Munita bit her lip.

"I care for no praise but yours," she said. Her dark eyes were wistful and offended.

Ernesto put his arm around her and kissed her affectionately.

"Munita is angry with me because I did not praise her horsemanship," he explained. "But it becomes monotonous to praise her every time she rides; for she always rides well."

Munita gave him a shining look. Her chin lifted and her nostrils stiffened with pride. A slight condescension mixed with the graciousness of her manner, as she turned to Tess.

"I must tell you that Ernesto said to me just now in Spanish that you have ridden well. I would not keep such a compliment from you."

Tess smiled, pleased.

"I'm glad I can ride well enough so I can go places with yer an' Ernesto. But I'll never ride like yer, Munita. When I first seen—saw—yer, I thought of a white bird sittin' as light, oh, as light as could be, on a branch."

"And to-day I am a blackbird, a crow!" Munita gestured toward her black skirt and blouse and laughed merrily. She had been praised by the

brother she adored and complimented by the girl who had caused her a brief jealous pang, so all the world was rose-colored again. She was ecstatically happy.

"Come," she said, "do not sit up so straight. Lie flat as the *vaqueros* do. It is so good to lie flat on the earth. It rests the back more than a hammock. Our brothers are talking about sheep, which are wholly uninteresting. Don Lank will soon make Ernesto also only a Kansas!"

Lank burst out laughing. She looked indignant.

"Me, I will never become a Kansas!" she asserted with almost vicious emphasis.

"Yer mean a farmer, I guess," Lank said.

"And you will become one because it is necessary that I should have your help," her brother told her. His voice sounded soft and lazy. He lay flat, pillowing his head on his clasped hands. "Now, for the present, do not interrupt us; because our conversation is important."

Munita subsided. She lay beside Tess and proceeded to tell her the strange romance of Doña Jones and Don Silencio.

"They met, oh, many years ago. She was then a young girl emerging from the school. Our uncle was

138 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

a young man and the friend of her father, who had a business in Monterey. The father requested him to meet her in England and to attend to her safety during the long and so perilous voyage. It was terrible, that sea journey! Almost they were wrecked. But Doña Jones was not seasick even once and she appeared always to be without fear, even at the worst moments which were at Cape Horn. Don Silencio said that, since he had never seen a woman who did not tremble or shriek in such moments, he became convinced that she was, in some sense, a goddess. This thought intrigued him more than if she were beautiful. He is always a dreamer, imagining himself establishing republics that will be better than is possible for republics. Mamma mocks him and says he desires to create a new Paradise but without any apples, whereas that is one fruit tree which will grow anywhere. So it was possible to his imagination to see Doña Jones as a goddess. Which he did, and asked her at once to marry him. They became engaged."

"Why didn't they marry?" Tess asked, absorbed.

"It seems they had loved each other solely for their courage! While the storm raged neither saw a fault in the other; only nobility. But California is

very peaceful. This is a ranch, and not Cape Horn. Alas! They remain engaged but they do not marry. When her father died, all his fortune had disappeared. Don Silencio insisted that she must live with his family because she was his fiancée. Sometimes this marriage has almost happened, but never entirely. It is very sad, but also very romantic." Munita sighed blissfully.

"I never want ter shriek when I'm scared," Tess remarked thoughtfully. "Do yer?"

"But of course; I am no goddess, but a Spanish girl. I shriek. It assists very much. It lets out something, like a good sneeze."

Pio Nahuan announced that supper was ready. They ate roasted antelope hungrily under the first stars.

"Oh, let us not go home!" Munita exclaimed suddenly. "To-night also there will be a marvelous moon. Nothing in life is so beautiful as the Mission in the moonlight."

"What is that?" Tess asked.

"It is the great ruin of the Mission church at El Cajón, by the sea. It was destroyed by an earthquake many years ago. Now there is left part of the bell tower and parts of the corridors. It stands upon

140 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

the mountain side immediately over the bay and the little town—a town smaller than El Toro. It is very beautiful there. But above all when the moon makes silver rays and shadows to move like ghosts through the arches! There are cougars and bears on the mountain. Let us go, Ernesto!"

"Well, you may go," he agreed indulgently. "To see beautiful things is also important. It is not far. We will not need to ride more than an hour. And we will rest here now until the moon is high."

When the sky began to drench the land with silver, they mounted and went on north. The road led them presently through a cleft, dark with the hill shadows. They came out into the white splendor of moonlight bathing the ruin above them and the hamlet and harbor below. A few lights showed in windows of the town, and on a sloop in the bay. Boats, belonging probably to fishermen, were moored to the shore by ropes tied to stakes driven into the side of the sea cliff.

They drew rein. Tess gazed with rapture on the vast ruin etched upon the silvered hill and sky. The moonlight slanted upon its broken cruciform, so that the arches of the crosspiece cast their shadows upon the argent flood which streamed through the main

corridor of arches. The effect was of motion, as if ancient spirits of the night moved there.

"The Indians who lived here long ago before the *padres* came, had a song which they used to sing when they made a religious feast to the moon," Munita said. "It was like this: 'As the moon dies and lives again, so we, having to die, shall live again.' Are you not glad you came to see it?"

"Yes," Tess whispered.

The silence was broken by the sound of hoofs. Several horses were coming at a jog trot. The cavalcade from the Golden Flowers urged their horses up the slope to leave the road free. A small band of riders, with laden pack horses, emerged from the dense shadow into the white glare. Apparently they distrusted the mounted figures which they saw motionless on the hillside. The leader gave vent to an exclamation of surprise or alarm—in English. They put their horses to a gallop as they went by.

"Their pack horses are loaded with hides," said Pio Nahuan to Ernesto. "A nose does not need to be clever to smell them."

"Ernesto," said Lank. "That big fellow in the lead is Ben Yellow."

"And as Pio says, the bales are hides. Then it is

142 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

now that this thief puts our hides on board the ship of his friend Captain Rosa." His tone snapped with anger.

They came down, across the road, to the edge of the sea bank, and watched Ben Yellow and his friends reach the town. They saw a light swung in signal and an answering signal from the small ship.

"This water is shallow. Besides it is low tide," Ernesto observed. "What shall we do? It is not advisable to go into the town and fight. We do not know how many friends they have there."

"A boat is comin' from the ship," said Lank. "Three men in it. Reckon one is Rosa."

"We got ter git the hides, Lank," Tess asserted, quietly.

"Sure. Tryin' ter study how ter do it without shootin'."

They could see figures at work unloading the horses.

"But why without shooting?" Munita demanded. "Surely it would be almost a pleasure to shoot such a wicked man." Her eyes flashed.

"You must behave yourself like a lady, or I will send you home," her brother informed her. "We do not know if Yellow has corrupted some officials, who

would seize the opportunity to make trouble and scandal for our father." He conferred in Spanish with Pio.

"They're packin' the bales down ter the boat," said Lank. "Some men come out of a house ter help 'em."

"Yes. They have friends here."

On Pio's suggestion the party separated. Lank, Tess, and four *vaqueros* were to dash into the town as soon as Yellow's forces divided and some of his henchmen were out on the bay with the boats. Munita had also been ordered, by Ernesto, to go with Lank; but she reined in behind them and waited, unnoticed, just within the shadows, to see what Ernesto and Pio would do.

The boats, piled high with bales, were being poled out over the wide shallows toward the deeper water in which the sloop was anchored. The polemen stood to their task.

With wild shouts and the lashing of quirts, Pio Nahuan and Ernesto led the *vaqueros* over the brink and down the face of the cliff. Screaming like a little savage, Munita put spurs to Running Dove and leaped after them. She was ablaze with indignation because Ernesto had intended to cheat her of a part

144 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

in so splendid an adventure. Down the cliff they went, scrambling, stumbling, plunging. The *vaqueros* were twirling their lassoes high in the air—the Mexican way. Ben Yellow, who sat on one of the bales with his gun on his knees, fired, but hit no one. Mr. Jute shrieked as something like a coiling snake descended about his body, pinioned his arms and hurled him over the side of the boat. Ernesto sent Captain Rosa to join him. Pio had stipulated that he was to attend to Ben Yellow. He had him bound fast now by the *lazo*. He gave his horse a good swim, while with mocking shouts, he dragged Yellow like a trout through the water. Several of the *vaqueros* were pulling the laden boats ashore. The agile Alvarez escaped the noose by throwing himself flat in the boat. Then he darted up, knife in hand, and made ready to throw the blade at the nearest target, Ernesto's back. Munita, standing in the stirrups, on her swimming horse, swung her quirt with all the force of her slim firm young arm.

"*Nariz respingada!*" She screamed, and lashed the knife from his hand. A *vaquero* knocked him overboard.

After carrying the bales ashore the *vaqueros* trussed up their drenched captives and dumped them

into the boats, with liberal applications of the *cuerda*. Then they fastened the boats securely to the stakes to which they had been moored before. They tossed the enemy's guns on the beach. In the morning, if not before, some one would discover the prisoners and set them free.

When they rejoined Lank and Tess and their comrades in the hamlet, they found that their aid was no longer needed. The friends of Ben Yellow were tied up tightly and their horses secured. A few householders had rushed out to inquire the reason of the disturbance but had taken the frankly given advice to go indoors again and remain quiet.

"*Señores*, one does not interfere with *vaqueros* and keep one's health!" The softly spoken, ominous suggestion had been enough.

There was no opposition while the pack horses, which had served Ben Yellow, were loaded again with the bales of hides and led off on the road to Golden Flowers.

"Oh, how magnificent to conquer evil men and, at the same time, to ride and swim in the moonlight!" Munita cried, galloping beside Tess.

Ernesto, who rode on the other side of Tess, leaned forward and said sternly:

146 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"You were disobedient. I told you to go with Lank, because what Pio and I planned to do was too dangerous for you. And you might have broken the legs of Running Dove, who is not a *vaquero's* pony. Besides, you were unladylike. You shouted a rude name at Alvarez."

"I called him Pug Nose. It was not a rude name! It was the truth!" she protested, almost tearful at his rebuke. "In the moonlight I saw his nose clearly. It was truly pug, Ernesto!"

She heard Lank laugh on her left.

"Yer a wonder, Munita," he said. "Any time Ernesto scolds yer, he'll have me ter fight."

"Oh! So? Well, if you take the part of Munita against me," said Ernesto, "then I will take the part of Tess against you."

Pio Nahuan, in a tone of profound melancholy, reminded Ernesto that they had forgotten the antelope meat, which they had dropped by the Mission before leaping the cliff.

"The mountain lions will thank you," said Munita, cheerily. "Do not regret that you have done them a service."

CHAPTER XVI

PLOWED FIELD AND VELVET SHOES

NEXT morning Pio Nahuan and his *vaqueros* departed for Monterey with the hides. They would see the entire shipment from the ranch put aboard the vessel that afternoon. She was to sail at sunset. Afterwards they would drive the captured pack horses to El Toro, and turn them loose, hobbled, in the field where they had been grazing while Lank was having his first encounter with their owner. Pio thought it absurd to give a villain back his horses, but he always obeyed Don Vicente's orders, however little approval he might feel for them. From El Toro the *vaqueros* would return to their range. Their visit at the hacienda was ended.

Chance had helped Lank Hardie greatly in his plans for the ranch. Pio and his *vaqueros* were his firm friends now, bound to him by the things they loved best—a joke and a fight. They would never

148 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

tire of telling one another how they had seized him, on the pinto horse, and brought him home a prisoner; nor how, all together, they had recovered the hides and left the thieves "trussed and well basted, like roasting fowls!"

"Nothing better could have happened to assist in making *vaqueros* become milkmen," said Ernesto.

Lank felt less sanguine about the deed to the ranch. Don Vicente had mentioned the matter, as something absurd but indicative of the thieving spirit of *gringos*, and the Governor had laughed.

"Since there has been settlement in California, that territory has belonged to De Sotos," he had said. "All the world knows it."

However, Don Vicente thought that, some day, when he went to Monterey again, he would make casual inquiry in the land office. It would be really interesting, he said, to see this old deed, granted nearly a hundred and fifty years ago! Don Silencio had intended to make an examination of the shipment of hides in the warehouse, but he had become so absorbed in the Governor's newly arrived curios from China that the matter had escaped his memory entirely. During dinner he had told himself that he would visit the warehouse immediately afterward.

But instead, he and the Governor—both devotees of the game—had played chess with antique Chinese pieces carved in ivory. However, it was of no consequence now, because the hides had been recovered.

“Through no fault of yours,” said Doña Jones, pointedly.

“*No pedir peras al olmo*,” he replied, smiling.

“He says, do not try to pick pears from an elm tree,” Munita murmured in Tess’s ear. “Spanish language is full of proverbs and I am sure our uncle knows them all. It is too bad that Doña Jones dislikes proverbs. It is now chiefly proverbs which keep them apart. Formerly it was revolutions. He fought in all that others made, and even made some himself.”

Tess did not answer. It seemed incredible that Don Vicente and Don Silencio should have omitted to do these two all-important things. The months which followed were to provide herself and Lank with abundant illustrations of the Spanish-American philosophy of life, as summed up in “Never do to-day what you can put off till to-morrow.”

Lank, grimly, worked the harder. He turned the soil with the first plow that had been seen in California. He reasoned that, given such soil and climate,

150 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
plowed land could raise several crops annually. He marshaled out the gardeners and bean-pickers with hoes, knives, and his scythe, and attacked the expanse behind the house, where mustard and weeds rioted. At first he could direct them only by gestures and exclamations. But, by constantly repeating the phrase he had learned from Doña Jones—"How do you say this in Spanish?"—he attained a crude practical knowledge of the language. Doña Jones often came out into the field to watch his progress and to help him, with interpretations. He learned a new life and a new speech in California—even as he had learned, in Kansas, all else that he knew—in contact with the soil.

Mamma, her white rose-petal skin protected by mantilla and parasol, made an excursion to the field to see for herself the miraculous plow which was being discussed throughout her household. She brought him a small dish of sweetmeats; it was Maruja's baking day. She exclaimed, aghast, at the transformation of the pretty mustard field into a flat surface lined with ugly brown furrows. What was his object? To grow many more beans, squashes, peppers, salads, onions! But why, since they had already, every year, enough of these things

to eat? Ah! To sell them in Monterey and El Toro! She was still puzzled. People in these towns, too, had all they needed already; and, if not, more could always be imported from Mexico. Munita explained that Lank was doing now what he had always done in Kansas.

"It makes me feel like home," he said, jestingly.

When Munita translated, Mamma understood. Her lovely eyes softened. Her expression was tender and sympathetic. Homesickness! Memory clinging passionately, through the doing of some habitual daily act, to the beloved past of home, parents, childhood! Mamma knew now why Lank plowed; it was to comfort his heart. She gave her consent on the instant. She urged Munita to assure him at once that the ugliness of the furrows no longer mattered. There was still, in fact, plenty of beautiful mustard in other directions. Always, impressively, *always*, the way for her new son to make her happy was to do the things which created happiness for himself.

Lank's eyes twinkled with humorous affection.

"Tell her this riddle for me," he said to Munita. "What is sweeter than jasmine though it has no scent, an' prettier than a rose though it's got no petals?"

152 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Mamma puzzled over this sincerely for several minutes, then rolled her eyes upward and, with open hands, gestured helplessly toward heaven.

"She says, tell her the answer," said Munita.

"Doña Emilia!" Lank declared.

Mamma cried out in delight, her eyes and teeth sparkling. She must hasten back to the house to tell it to Don Vicente! She tripped away as gay as a lark at morning, carefully picking a path through the newly turned earth for her velvet shoes.

"It would be terrible, cruel—oh, so wicked—if that bad man, Yellow, could steal this land!" Munita exclaimed passionately. "For Mamma, all the world is here. She would be so unhappy, she would die!"

"Anybody that steals from her will do it over my dead body," said Lank, grimly. He had fallen victim to Doña Emilia's charm the first day; and, like every one else, now frankly adored her.

"*¡Sí! Sí!* It is ours, ours, the land!"

"Sure, it is," Lank answered, quietly, putting his hands again to the plow.

Mamma, the impractical and all-pervasive, became his stanch ally. His purposes and motives were dark to her. Her mind ignored the existence

of all that might come under the heads of finance and economy. But his happiness was a vital matter. She was surprised, later, to see her own children taking to these odd "Kansoos habits," as she called them, Ernesto milking, Munita churning—Mamma was bewildered, though she heartily praised the butter; the imported article could not compare with it! But she opposed the kindly mockery which Don Vicente and Don Silencio leveled at the young people. Since it made her four children happy to do these curious things, no one must scoff. What was life for, if not for joy?

"Doña Emilia is at once the least useful person in the world, in every practical sense, and the most unselfish," Doña Jones said to Lank, with her dry smile. "She cares only about the happiness of others, and she finds all her own in it."

CHAPTER XVII

ERNESTO FIGHTS THE BLACK BULL

FENCING presented its special problems. In the end Lank enclosed his field with adobe topped with mesquite. The mesquite discouraged wandering live stock from trying to leap in among the inviting green stuffs. During that first year, the ranch did well in hides, tallow, and sheep's wool and began to sell garden goods, butter, cheese, and eggs. Ernesto thought that next year something could be done about the olives. Oil had been made on the ranch in his grandfather's time; why not again?

"But what I would like best to do, would be to breed fine horses, break them myself for riding and driving, and sell them to such persons as really deserve to handle fine horses!" he said, laughingly. "Some day I will do it!"

All the cousins came to see the plow and the churn and the furrows and to hold a feast. They

came again to celebrate Don Silencio's birthday; later, for Doña Emilia's. They kept Christmas at the Golden Flowers. Most of them remained to see the old year out. Lank realized that he could not change this Californian custom immediately. Perhaps he could never change it. But the day would come when the young cousins, at least, would be invited to do some work, to produce something, on those portions of the ranch where they lived. Ernesto would help in this; because Ernesto had discovered that farming was a delightful occupation. The younger De Sotos were dynamos of energy. Lank and Tess were showing them other outlets for it than wild riding, which had been their only one.

When spring came again, two cousins named Montez went out with Ernesto to Pio Nahuan's range to choose milch cows for themselves. Another kinsman had started a bean and onion patch.

"It is really interesting to watch these things grow; and, when they are grown, they are very good to eat," he said. "What a mistake we have made to think that imported things were better than the things that we can grow in California!"

Tess spoke Spanish now fluently, and her English had improved greatly under Doña Jones's in-

156 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

struction. She was naturally adaptable and impressionable; and she was acquiring, through admiration and unconscious imitation, the graceful manners, refined inflections, and lovely courtesy of Doña Emilia and of Munita when the tomboy was sloughed off and she came, in mantilla and ruffles, to the chocolate table. Lank was slower to change in deportment and speech. His ear did not catch fine distinctions readily. He had ample Spanish for his needs, but he pronounced it badly. His manners had not, as yet, become polished; but he was no longer crude. His former infliction of embarrassed silence had disappeared in this all-pervading atmosphere of courtesy and consideration. His English was grammatically better, but his accent still smacked of Kansas; probably it always would. It seemed that their wagon had collapsed on the poppy field to bring about the mingling of the best in the two splendid races which have made the New World. The Hardies brought labor and economy and "squareness" and gratitude; and the De Sotos contributed generosity, full generosity of both hand and heart, honor, and the fineness of feeling, the love of beauty, and the distinction of manner and speech which characterized the hidalgos. In cour-

age, they did not need to make exchange; for they were equal. They had respected each other from the first day of their coming together. A year later, they were like one devoted family.

Don Silencio returned from Monterey, one evening, with disquieting rumors. There was talk of war between Mexico and the United States. Some disputes had arisen, it seemed, in a far-off Mexican province named Texas. This alone would not greatly excite the Californians. Although they were Mexican, in a legal sense, since California was also a Mexican province, they lived their independent life as Californians, not as Mexicans. The cry of Mexico at war would not make every Californian leap to his saddle and spur into the fray. Not unless his own beloved country, California itself, were menaced. But this also was talked of, said Don Silencio. The rumors had it that Americans were plotting to seize California by force of arms, if Mexico and the United States went to war. This was, so rumor said, the real reason of the expedition, now in their country, led by an American soldier named Frémont. His men were to assist the Americans resident here in seizing the country. Was it possible that the American men of business,

158 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

householders, and so forth, who had been so generously welcomed by the Californians, would make their hosts such a base return? Bad things might properly be expected of ruffians like Ben Yellow. That worthy, who had disappeared for months, had now returned to El Toro. He had brought a band of evil faces with him, from all accounts.

But an unpleasant affair which might, after all, not occur was quickly put aside for a pleasant one which was imminent. This was the bullfight in the arena at El Toro. While all the ranchers, and Monterey folk also, were athrill with expectation, the coming event was of most concern to the people at the Golden Flowers—because they bred the fighting bulls. Three perfect animals, rather small jet-black fellows, had been brought up and tenderly guarded by Pio Nahuan for this great occasion.

"It is really true," said Ernesto, "no man can train a fighting bull better than Pio Nahuan."

"I'm scared of the bulls. They look so fierce. I wish you'd let somebody else fight them and not do it yourself," Tess said, with a troubled frown.

Ernesto laughed, his green eyes dancing. "Oh, but I shall love it!" he cried. "It is the first time I do it at the Fiesta. And I must win over the other

matadores; because the prize is a wonderful bridle and saddle—carved Cordovan leather, silver-mounted. How much I need that harness!”

“Bullfighting with us, like horse racing, is not professional. It is a gentleman’s sport,” said Don Vicente to Tess. “Of course, it has its dangers.” He shrugged. “But that is one of the frailties of the Spanish temperament—to love danger for no good purpose, but merely for its own sake.”

“You will love to see all the flowers,” Mamma told her.

They rode amid flowers to the town. Their saddle blankets were massed with roses and their bridles strung with them. The road was alive with trotting hoofs and blowing petals, as all the great valley rode to the festival. Ropes of flowers and colored paper adorned El Toro. An orchestra of guitars played in the plaza. Mr. Jute’s window was decorated. Lank commented on it mockingly to Pio.

The sports began with an exhibition of trick riding by several *vaqueros*. Lank did not see it because he was with Pio at the cattle shed. This was a low adobe building divided into stalls. Each bull had his own, in which he champed with impatience wait-

ing his turn. A small window space enabled him to see the arena and the familiar spectacle of wild-riding men, which stirred him so hotly with the desire to get out and give them a run for their money that he was in a perfect fighting mood when his time came.

Pio's bulls were beautiful creatures, coal-black, sleek, and shiny. Their legs and little hoofs were finely shaped, their heads small; their glaring eyes suggested a spirit as fierce as any holiday crowd could desire. They had been trained to wear the stuffed leather cushions which were fastened firmly on the tips of their horns. They seemed even to feel a pride in their rose and ribbon streamers.

"This is the one Don Ernesto will fight," said Pio. "He is the smallest and blackest and also the swiftest. His name is Little Fire of the Night. You see, the horns cannot hurt; only the feet. He can kill with the feet."

The two other bulls had their innings with the gentlemen matadores, giving the occasion for some pretty riding. Lank was in a good position to see the contest when Ernesto rode into the ring, his slim body sheathed in black, a red cape hanging

Ernesto Fights the Black Bull 161

from one shoulder, his black horse prancing and shaking petals right and left. He made the round of the spectators, and acknowledged their greetings, jests, and good wishes, with his sombrero off and held high. Then he turned, drawing rein, at the opposite end of the arena from the shed.

Bellowing and snorting, Little Fire of the Night shot out of the shed. Halfway across the field he stopped and surveyed the motionless horseman. He tossed his head and stamped. Ernesto had loosened his cape; now he dipped it to the bull like a flag. Little Fire of the Night knew what was expected of him when scarlet cloth was shaken at him. He charged. Ernesto dashed at full gallop to meet him. Just when it seemed that horse and bull were actually in collision, Ernesto turned aside and blinded the bull by sweeping the cape across his eyes. When Little Fire of the Night was able to stop his own rush he was again a field's length from his foe. He began all over again, bent on vengeance. Ernesto kept up this racing play until the bull was a little tired and very angry. Then he went after him on foot; while Pio, mounted, guarded his horse, and two *vaqueros* rode in to intervene if Ernesto were knocked down.

162 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"This is the terrible part," Munita whispered, with pale lips. Tess wanted to shut her eyes, yet somehow could not.

As the bull charged, Ernesto stepped aside and vaulted over his back. The spectators went wild. This was the real scene of the fight. The rest had been only play. Charge after charge was made and avoided, until finally Ernesto leaped squarely upon the bull's back and covered its head with the cloak. And Little Fire of the Night trembled in the sudden darkness and stood still. Pio slipped the lasso around his neck and led him away. Ernesto mounted his horse and rode round the arena, while flowers and confetti rained on him. His face was pale, his green eyes were hard and bright; but he had a smile for his sister and Tess tossing him roses with trembling hands. Then he drew up with the other aspirants before the judges' stand.

"Gosh!" said Lank, who hardly ever used expletives. "You had me scared as much as the girls for a few minutes, Ernesto. There's some California tricks a boy I know from Kansas will never learn!"

They were seated in the meadow among other groups of picnickers devouring the refreshments which they had brought with them.

"Oh, it is in our blood," Ernesto answered lightly. His eyes gleamed.

"You did wholly unnecessary things, to frighten us!" Munita shrilled at him. Tess, still pale, looked at him with wonder and reproach in her blue eyes. Both girls had been under so tense a strain that they were now on the verge of tears.

"Why do you little girls make such a fuss?" he mocked softly. "Do not cry; and then perhaps I will allow you to ride, once each, on my new saddle."

"I guess you'll hate me for it, Ernesto," Tess said, her lips trembling slightly. "But I'm going to get Mamma and your father to forbid you to do it again."

"*¡Sí!* He will forbid!" Munita cried.

"Of course he will," Ernesto laughed. "I am sure that, every year, *after* the fight, my grandparents forbade *him*. After, not before! He was very good at this sport when he was a young man. But he says I am better." His eyes flashed again.

"Hullo! Who's comin'?" Lank stood up to see. A band of horsemen trotted along the road and turned into El Toro.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRÉMONT AND KIT CARSON PROMISE AID

“LET’S go down there an’ find out about those men,” Lank said. Tess and Munita refused to be left behind; so the four mounted and rode into the plaza. There were sounds of music and mirth, and color, surging motion everywhere, but the shouts from the inn topped the other noises.

“Our *vaqueros* are celebrating your victory,” Lank said. “Don Vicente will get a bill as long as your arm.”

“No, he will not!” Ernesto retorted emphatically. “Come in with me. Stay here at the door, on your horses,” he added to the girls. The boys dismounted, gave their reins to their sisters to hold, and strode inside.

A roar of enthusiasm greeted Ernesto. He lifted his hat high in response to it, as he had done in the ring. Then, discovering the innkeeper, he went to speak to him and paid no further attention to the

stamping and clapping. Lank had noticed that two men seated at a small table were evidently too intent on their food, or conversation, to take part in the demonstration. Now he saw Pio Nahun bend suddenly in between them, push them apart with his elbows, and stick the point of a knife at each man's throat. They clapped as if for dear life. Lank burst out laughing, Pio's expression of malicious glee, and the apparently accidental way in which the knives in his hands pressed closer, amused him. Then he recognized one pasty face, the mouth emitting tremulous "bravos!" It was Mr. Jute.

"Mateo, to-night and always hereafter, the score will not exceed the sum I name." Lank heard Ernesto's voice now that the cheers were over.

"But, Don Ernesto! It is ruin! Besides, *vaqueros* are fierce men! Would I dare to refuse whatever *vaqueros* demanded?"

"Not if you are wise. But the score will be so much and no more."

"That noble gentleman, the Señor Don Vicente, never treated poor Mateo in this fashion!" Mateo wrung his hands.

"No, truly. You know that he never looked at a bill, but paid all your extortions. From now on,

166 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

remember that you are not dealing with a noble gentleman, but with his son, who is only a rough bullfighter."

"But, *Caballero*, how can you speak so on the very day when you have received a beautiful saddle with real silver trimmings?" The innkeeper's cheeks were wet with tears.

"Because I wish to keep the saddle, instead of selling it for debt; and do not intend to put the silver trimmings into your cash box," was Ernesto's heartless answer, as he turned on his heel. He grinned at Lank. "One leak is stopped in the sieve," he said.

When they stepped outside they saw that the girls were in animated conversation with two men. One, standing by Tess and holding her hand, was a sandy man with ruddy cheeks and keen bright blue eyes. The other was dark, with a proud restless expression.

"Kit Carson!" Lank cried. He ran to greet him. The sandy man met him halfway with the frontier bear hug.

"Boy, the little sister's ben tellin' me an' Frémont fairy tales. But the hoss she's ridin' purty near makes me believe her. Golly, what a hoss!"

Frémont and Kit Carson Promise Aid 167

"Wish you'd come in time for the bullfight. You'd have seen ridin' as well as a horse," Lank replied, and presented Ernesto.

"His sister's ben tellin' Frémont about it. Chief, here's the boy, Lank Hardie. An' here's the señorita's brother."

Frémont shook hands with both of them. For an instant his fiery eyes seemed to bore into them. Then they shifted back to absorbed contemplation of the two beautiful girls who made such a striking picture, because of their contrasting types, as they sat side by side on their thoroughbred horses. The romantic nature of the man, his passion for the strange and the picturesque, were vividly stirred by the story Tess had told Carson; the more stirred because the story was illustrated by two faces in which he could see no flaw. He listened readily to all that Lank told him about Ben Yellow and the threat of the stolen deed.

"This is the land of miracles, and more miracles will happen here—soon," he added impressively. "The Ranch of the Golden Flowers will be safely secured to this generous and noble De Soto family, whatever happens. I promise you that, on my honor as a soldier."

168 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

Lank felt relieved. Frémont was on his way now to Monterey and therefore he could do something positive immediately to checkmate Ben Yellow.

Presently they were homeward bound, with a concourse of friends who would sup and dance at the hacienda. Every one cheered the bulls as they were led out on the road. Tired but proud of their part in the festival, Little Fire of the Night and his two comrades trotted along contentedly at the end of their *lazos*. El Toro, dropping into the distance, was a dusky shadow sparked with torches, from which came faintly the twanging of guitars playing for the folk dances. Mamma, in the carriage, began to thrum her own guitar. Tess and Munita caught up the air first. Soon they were all singing "La Paloma," as they rode through a perfumed world turning crystal and silver under the advancing moon.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE OF THE LASSO, AND THE GOLD RUSH

AFTER the Fiesta the young people settled down again to the calm and busy life of the ranch. One July day this calm was again shaken by Don Vicente, who returned from Monterey with the news that an American naval man named Sloat had raised the flag of the United States over Monterey. That country and Mexico were at war; and it was plain that the Americans meant to seize California.

"I wonder what we should do about it," Don Silencio queried.

"Not fight, I hope," Doña Jones said, with an anxious look. "You have fought against Mexico several times since I have known you. Why should you fight *for* her now?"

"Those were only fights to get rid of governors she sent here, whom we did not like. In your colder, well-ordered, and self-respecting country, when you

170 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers
disapprove of a high official you hold public meetings or write letters—signed Vox Populi—to the papers, and you shame the villain into resigning. But, with us, when a high official has a fat place, with the chance to levy on all the smugglers of Monterey, nothing but cannon will get him out.”

“At any rate,” Don Vicente continued his tale, “we need do nothing until some official step is taken. The truth is, Mexico is not able to defend California. And we are too few to defend ourselves against any country which has more than one warship and can send a thousand soldiers with adequate weapons. The arms of defense for the port of Monterey, for instance, are like the gold lace on the Governor’s jacket: for ornament, purely.”

“It could be bombarded successfully with a shower of nuts,” Don Silencio agreed.

“Well, until they start cracking the shells I will not worry,” Ernesto declared. “As yet, I do not see any principle to fight for; and I am not bloodthirsty enough to enjoy killing men. And for glory, I prefer the bull ring!”

So that was what Frémont had started in Monterey, Lank mused. Well, the man had given his word for the protection of the Golden Flowers. He

applied himself vigorously to the legitimate business of a farmer.

They heard of minor disturbances from time to time; but they took no part in them. They were not roused to any pitch of frenzy when at last the word came that Mexico had ceded California to the United States. California had been far enough away from Mexico City to live its own placid, joyous, independent life. It was farther from Washington. They expected to go on much as they had been doing.

The Golden Flowers, indeed, was much more concerned about robberies and depredations committed on other ranches which were more isolated. They felt sure that these were the work of Ben Yellow and his band. There was news, too, of herds of cattle appearing in the south. These were Mexican cattle, undoubtedly. They wondered if the herders had been called into the army in the war which had just ended; leaving the cattle to roam. Many moving cows could bring disaster, now that parts of the ranch were under cultivation.

One day an unprepossessing stranger rode to the mansion with an official communication. The new American land commissioner for the district, hav-

172 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

ing learned that Don Vicente had no legal title to the territory he occupied, instructed him to move off. The letter was signed by Mr. Jute, who now represented his government in this capacity.

"I've got to go find Frémont and make him keep his word," said Lank. "He went north."

"He may even have left California," Ernesto said. "I have said that I do not wish to kill. But I know that, if they come to try to take the ranch, I will shoot till my gun is empty; and I will take care that no bullet misses."

"Munita and I can shoot, too," said Tess.

That day about sunset, one of the women servants rushed into the house, breathless from running and fright. She had been on the hill, at the top where she could see a long way. There were men camped on the other side. She thought they wished to hide themselves. And, in the other direction, she had seen Pio Nahun and many *vaqueros* riding toward the house.

Pio arrived shortly. He had come in to say that Mexican cows, "wild as lions," were overrunning his range. It was a large herd; and, if they could not be turned, they threatened to absorb his cattle and sweep them on with them. He wished the cousins

sent for, to help. Ernesto told him of the other danger.

"Ernesto," said Lank, "if we've got to fight Ben Yellow, we don't want the battle here, around the house. There isn't any law in California now. Jute is only a thief. They don't know it in Washington, but you and I know it. We've got to settle him and Ben Yellow ourselves. There's no time for me to go huntin' Frémont now."

"You mean we must ride down on him and give him battle where he is."

Lank nodded. They conferred with Pio.

"We're going with Pio," Lank told Tess and Munita. "We've sent Lázaro to call out the locusts—you know, I mean the cousins. You girls bring your guns and stay on the hilltop and watch. If they beat us and break through, you race back here and warn the household to get ready for them. Don Vicente has to stay with Mamma and Doña Jones, and look out for the house. Don Silencio is coming with us."

Doña Jones, however, refused to remain in the house. She rode to the hilltop, too, with her gun. Below, in the valley, where, three years ago, Tess had seen the *vaqueros* rope cattle on Don Vicente's

174 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

birthday, there was taking place one of the strangest events in the history of this land of miracles. Ben Yellow's mounted band outnumbered the men from the Golden Flowers; but their numbers and their mounts were a detriment to them and their guns were almost useless. Pio Nahun and his *vaqueros* treated that body of men like a herd of cattle. They rode into them at a mad gallop, each choosing his opponent as he would choose his steer, with the strong hide lasso twirling and leaping for the man's body, which was lifted into a more convenient position for roping by the horse under it. Ben Yellow would have had a better chance on foot. The marauders could not ride as *vaqueros* rode, stopping a mad gallop on the instant, turning a horse aside, at an incredible angle, in the midst of a rush! Mad steers charging, stampeding and milling horns, had not been their teachers. They could sit their horses, and shoot, even at a gallop; but their bullets went wild, because the cow ponies, answering to pressure on the cruel Spanish bit, swerved, swift as flashes. The lariat, though, seldom missed.

It would have been a bloodless battle but for Lank and Don Silencio, who shot the rifles out of the hands of two men, who were aiming for the backs

of *vaqueros* busy with the rope. And it would have been a fatal battle; for the strength of the rope, jerking a man from the saddle, was sufficient to break a neck. The *vaqueros* meant it to be fatal. Pio had Ben Yellow on the ground, the lasso, not round his neck, but under one of his arms. Another man had unhorsed Mr. Jute, by the neck. Mr. Jute did not rise again. A number of them were down, being dragged, and their horses were fleeing over the other hill. Shouting, Pio started at a race up that farther hill, dragging Ben Yellow; and his *vaqueros* followed him. Two men lay in the valley where they had been thrown from their saddles.

Pio, looking southward, stopped and yelled at his men. They also looked. The lower end of the little valley was massed with cows. They came on at a trot. Some began to run faster. They were spreading up both hillsides. Pio knew that, presently, he would be cut off from the house; and that the cattle would probably surge down on the fields and gardens, unless he and his men crossed the valley in time to drive them back. The *vaqueros* dropped their victims and tore back across the valley. Ernesto came up and ordered the girls and Doña Jones to go home; but they refused to obey.

176 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

For several hours they rode up and down, driving the cattle from the near hill and sending them up the other. A number of the "locusts" arrived in time to help. When, weary, at nightfall, they started home, Ernesto said to Lank:

"The wild cows are between the ranch and Ben Yellow, if he is still alive. We can eat and sleep in peace to-night."

Several days passed without any sign of the land jumpers. Then one morning when it was yet hardly light, Pio reported that Ben Yellow and five men were coming along the road. These were perhaps all who had escaped the bone-snapping power of the lariat and the hoofs of the migrating herd. The whole house was quickly awakened and put on guard. Munita and Tess and their brothers, armed, went on foot to a point close upon the road where, screened by thick bushes, they could watch the highway in both directions. The cousins and Pio's men took up other stations. Soon they saw the six men walking their horses slowly through the thick dust of the road, in order to come on the house quietly. They pulled in immediately outside the shrubbery where the four young people were.

"I'm goin' ter set here till I see one o' them Sotos

come out an' then I'm goin' ter shoot," said Yellow. His malevolent eyes roved over the house. Silently, white-lipped, but fiercely determined, Munita and Tess aimed at him, and waited for orders.

There came the sound of hoofs from the other direction and a man hove into view riding as if demons were after him. He stood up in his stirrups and yelled, waving his arms.

"Ben! Ben!" he shouted. "Come on! Hurry! Ride, Ben!"

"Yer gone crazy?" Ben snarled, grabbing him by the shoulder, as his horse stopped and he reeled in the saddle. His face was crimson, his eyes wild. He fought like a madman in the other man's grasp.

"I come all the way back to tell yer, Ben! It's a fortune. Gold, Ben! Gold! I seen it. Lyin' on the ground like dirt! Up Sutter's way, Ben! They've struck gold like no man never seen it afore." His voice rose to a falsetto shriek and broke. He stopped, gasping.

Ben Yellow shook him violently again, and growled something at him.

"It's true, Ben! There's a stampede on! Seen 'em runnin' out o' Frisco like bees from a hive! Hittin' the trail fer the diggin's! Stop foolin'

178 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

round this cattle ranch! What's land an' hides an' tallow," he screamed hoarsely, "when yer can pick up gold like daisies?"

The other man crowded closer. They had forgotten all about being quiet. They rained questions on the newcomer, shouted them at him. He told them, bit by bit, more lucidly now, of Marshall's strike, the awesome richness uncovered by the chance scrape of a pick.

Ben Yellow's face was twitching as if a spasm had seized him. His eyes glared. Suddenly he tore loose the heavy sack that was hanging from his saddle, and flung it away. His rifle followed. He brought his quirt down heavily on the head of the messenger's horse and drove it out of his path. Lying forward almost on the neck of his own horse, he lashed it into a racing gallop. Two other men, who had rifles, threw them away as they tore after him. Even the weight of a gun might delay fortune! The seven—seized by the madness of gold—hurled on in a cloud of dust, yelling like maniacs.

"They're gone!" Munita gasped.

"But what does it mean?" Tess whispered.

Ernesto and Lank went out and gathered up what the men had thrown away. They made careful ex-

amination of the various papers in Ben Yellow's bag. Evidently his friend, the corrupt clerk, had been generous. There were other deeds besides the one to the Hacienda de las Flores de Oro. Ernesto's green eyes glittered as he looked down at the parchment in his hand.

Munita and Tess flung their arms round each other and wept. The sun came over the horizon. The beauty of an imperishable gold lay upon the land.

It turned out that Frémont had not forgotten his romantic promise. The whole family rode into Monterey a week later in response to a letter from the chief American authority in that section. He turned out to be a pleasant, sincere man with a boy and girl of his own. He was able to appreciate what the De Soto family had done for two Kansas orphans; and then, too, the story had lost nothing in Frémont's telling of it. Now he heard it again from both parties, each of whom assured him that the other had given the greater gifts.

"Your mother doesn't speak English," he said to Munita, "but—"

"Not spik," Mamma interrupted, blithely.

He smiled.

180 The Ranch of the Golden Flowers

"But she was saying something so earnestly just then that I'd like to know what it was."

Munita made an apologetic little gesture.

"Señor, Mamma says that all these things have been done in love; and, therefore, it is not right to speak of them as if they were bargains."

"So, she rebukes us all, eh? Well then, we will make a new registry of the Ranch of the Golden Flowers—with love. I suppose the Gold Rush doesn't tempt you, Lank?"

Lank shook his head.

"I'm just a farmer. So is Ernesto, now. And the girls, too."

"Just farmers," Tess and Munita echoed happily.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

California: the name itself is a romance, and California is the fulfilment of a romantic dream.

In 1510 a Spanish author named Montalvo issued a book, titled *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, which related exploits in a fabulous country of the New World where the people's armor and weapons were "All of gold and so was the harness of the wild beasts they tamed to ride." Here were gold, fruits, flowers, magical cities, and the climate of paradise. The name of this garden spot was "California." Hence the name given early in the sixteenth century to the newly discovered territory northwest of Mexico, where the romantic imaginings of those early Spaniards have since come true!

Spanish colonial life flowered at its best in California. In fact, and in spirit, its indelible imprint is on California to-day, traceable in speech, habits, architecture, laws, and joyous liberality. This book offers an intimate picture of that life as it was just

before the Gold Rush of 1849, when Americans were beginning to take part in it.

It is designed as one more scene in the panorama of pioneer and wilderness life in the Western Hemisphere, which the author began to present to young readers with *Silent Scot* and *The White Leader* (Tennessee and Louisiana), and has continued with *Becky Landers* (Kentucky), *The Tiger Who Walks Alone* (South America), *Roselle of the North* (Canadian Northwest), and *Andy Breaks Trail* (the Great West in the days of Lewis and Clark).

CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER.

